

The Effect of Distribution and Product Quality on The Purchase Decision of Prim-A Mineral Water at PT Delada Cahaya Mas Agro Gunungsitoli With Brand Awareness as A Mediation Variable

Fredika Ade Pratama Agustiawan¹, Idarni Harefa², Otanius Laia³, Yupiter Mendrofa⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Faculty of Economics, Management, Nias University, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of distribution and product quality on purchasing decisions of Prim-A mineral water at PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro, with brand awareness as a mediating variable. The increasing competition in the bottled water industry requires companies not only to strengthen distribution networks but also to maintain product quality in order to build consumer trust and brand recognition. This research employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with SmartPLS 4. A total of 100 respondents in Gunungsitoli were selected through accidental sampling. The findings indicate that distribution has a direct and significant positive effect on purchasing decisions (p -value < 0.05). Product quality, however, does not directly influence purchasing decisions (p -value > 0.05) but significantly affects them indirectly through brand awareness (p -value < 0.05), which acts as a full mediator. Brand awareness thus plays a critical role in linking product quality to consumer decision-making. The study suggests that companies should expand distribution reach while simultaneously implementing branding strategies to enhance awareness and consumer perception. The results provide theoretical implications for marketing management and practical recommendations for local distributors competing with established national brands such as Aqua and Le Minerale.

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Corresponding Author:

Fredika Ade Pratama Agustiawan,
Faculty of Economics, Management,
Nias University, Indonesia.

Jl. Karet No.30, Ps. Gn. Sitoli, Sumatera Utara 22812. Indonesia

Email: fredikaade65@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the bottled water industry has experienced remarkable growth, driven by the increasing public awareness of the importance of consuming clean and healthy water. This trend has resulted in intense market competition, where both national and local brands compete to gain consumer preference (Suhartono et al., 2023). Companies are no longer able to rely solely on distribution networks but must also ensure product quality as a decisive factor in maintaining competitiveness. Effective distribution ensures product availability at the right time and place, while consistent quality builds consumer trust. In this context, distribution and product quality serve as critical determinants of purchasing decisions (Vermeulen et al., 2022).

Gunungsitoli City, located in North Sumatra, represents a promising regional market for bottled water. Based on statistical data, the proportion of households consuming packaged drinking

water increased significantly between 2022 and 2023, indicating a growing reliance on bottled water. Among the brands available, Prim-A, distributed by PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro, attempts to compete with established players such as Aqua and Le Minerale. However, despite being present in the market, Prim-A's sales performance remains relatively low, suggesting underlying challenges in distribution effectiveness and brand positioning (Curado et al., 2022).

One of the primary challenges faced by Prim-A lies in its distribution system. Inconsistent stock availability, untimely product delivery, and uneven market coverage reduce consumer accessibility. Consumers who encounter product shortages are more likely to shift their choices toward competing brands with stronger and more reliable distribution networks. This indicates that distribution is not merely a logistical issue but a crucial element of consumer purchasing behavior. Distribution efficiency is directly associated with product visibility and availability, which are key to driving purchase decisions (Siswanto & Yuliana, 2022).

In addition to distribution, product quality also plays a decisive role in influencing consumer behavior. The clarity, taste, and packaging of mineral water are essential attributes shaping consumer perceptions. Inconsistent quality reduces consumer trust and damages brand credibility. High-quality products that meet or exceed consumer expectations encourage satisfaction and loyalty, whereas inconsistency leads to switching behavior. For Prim-A, consumer concerns about packaging design and product consistency have limited its ability to compete with stronger brands (Vermeulen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, purchasing decisions are not only influenced by functional attributes such as distribution and quality but also by how consumers perceive the brand itself. Brand awareness serves as the foundation for consumer consideration. Without sufficient recognition and recall, even products with superior quality may fail to enter consumers' consideration sets. In the case of Prim-A, low brand awareness further weakens its competitive positioning, as consumers in Gunungsitoli are more familiar with established brands like Aqua and Le Minerale (Kuo et al., 2022).

Brand awareness functions as a cognitive anchor in consumer decision-making processes. It determines whether a brand is recognized, recalled, and considered during the evaluation stage of purchase. When a product lacks awareness, consumers may exclude it entirely from their purchasing options. This highlights the importance of brand-building activities in reinforcing distribution and quality efforts (Eneis et al., 2022). In fact, marketing literature emphasizes that brand awareness can mediate the impact of distribution and product quality on purchasing behavior, thereby amplifying their effects.

In practice, although Prim-A products are available in several outlets in Gunungsitoli, weak brand visibility diminishes consumer motivation to choose them. Established competitors not only dominate distribution networks but also reinforce their presence through aggressive marketing campaigns, strengthening consumer loyalty. Consequently, Prim-A struggles to gain traction, suggesting that brand awareness may be the missing link between distribution, product quality, and consumer purchasing decisions (Tari et al., 2023).

Consumer purchasing decisions themselves are multifaceted, involving both rational and emotional considerations. According to Kotler and Keller in (Ndruru et al., 2025), the decision-making process involves stages such as need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Within this framework, distribution, quality, and brand awareness contribute significantly to shaping consumer preferences and final choices. Inadequate performance in any of these areas undermines the overall likelihood of product selection. This situation raises important managerial questions: Do distribution and product quality directly influence purchase decisions, or is their effect mediated by brand awareness? Understanding this relationship is critical for companies like PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro to design more effective marketing strategies. Without empirical evidence, decisions on resource allocation to distribution or branding remain speculative and potentially inefficient.

Several prior studies have examined the role of distribution and product quality in consumer behavior. Research has consistently shown that distribution effectiveness enhances product availability and accessibility, while product quality increases consumer satisfaction. Moreover, brand awareness has been identified as a significant mediator that strengthens the link between product attributes and consumer decisions (Halawa, Sridadi, et al., 2023). Nevertheless, most of these

studies have focused on larger markets or urban settings, leaving smaller regional markets like Gunungsitoli underexplored.

This research gap is significant, as regional markets often exhibit unique consumer behaviors shaped by local culture, purchasing power, and limited product availability. Unlike major cities where brand competition is highly saturated, local markets present opportunities for emerging brands to establish themselves through tailored strategies. However, these opportunities can only be realized if companies understand how distribution, product quality, and brand awareness interact in influencing consumer choices (Halawa, Anggraini, et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by empirically testing the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between distribution, product quality, and purchase decisions in the context of Prim-A mineral water. By doing so, it contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches marketing literature by providing evidence from a regional market. Practically, it offers PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro insights into how to strengthen its competitive advantage against dominant brands. The importance of this study is further highlighted by the potential of Prim-A to grow in Gunungsitoli's market. By improving distribution efficiency and reinforcing product quality while simultaneously investing in brand-building, the company could enhance both consumer awareness and purchasing decisions. In turn, this would enable it to achieve sustainable growth and compete more effectively.

In conclusion, the study is designed to investigate whether distribution and product quality exert direct effects on purchase decisions or whether these effects occur indirectly through brand awareness. The findings are expected to provide a data-driven foundation for formulating marketing strategies that integrate distribution, product quality, and branding as complementary drivers of consumer purchasing behavior.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design with a correlational approach to examine the relationships among distribution, product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. The quantitative method was selected because it allows systematic measurement, statistical testing, and generalization of findings. A correlational design was appropriate to identify both direct and indirect influences, particularly in testing the mediating role of brand awareness. The research model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4, which is suitable for complex models with multiple constructs and mediation testing (Halawa, Sridadi, et al., 2023).

The research population consisted of all consumers of Prim-A mineral water in Gunungsitoli City, North Sumatra. Given the limited accessibility to the entire population, an accidental sampling technique was applied, resulting in a sample size of 100 respondents. This method was considered practical and representative for capturing consumer behavior in the study area. Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire based on a Likert scale, which measured perceptions related to distribution, product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. The questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents at retail outlets and public areas where Prim-A was available (Halawa, Anggraini, et al., 2023).

To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments, the study conducted a series of tests, including convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability analysis. The structural model was then evaluated through path coefficient analysis, bootstrapping for hypothesis testing, and R-square assessment for explanatory power. These procedures ensured that the findings were statistically robust and accurately reflected the causal relationships among the studied variables (Vermeulen et al., 2022). The methodological framework thus provided a solid foundation to test whether brand awareness mediates the influence of distribution and product quality on consumer purchasing decisions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The descriptive analysis of respondent characteristics showed a balanced representation of consumers in Gunungsitoli. In terms of gender, the sample included both male and female respondents with relatively equal proportions, reflecting the general consumer base of bottled water

in the city. Age distribution was dominated by respondents between 20 and 35 years old, indicating that younger and working-age consumers were the primary target market for Prim-A mineral water. In terms of occupation, a significant portion of respondents were employees and students, suggesting that convenience and product accessibility are important factors influencing purchase behavior (Loughhead et al., 2023).

The analysis of consumer responses to distribution variables revealed that although Prim-A products were available in multiple retail outlets, distribution was not perceived as fully efficient. Several respondents indicated difficulties in consistently finding the product across different stores. The mean scores suggested moderate levels of agreement that Prim-A was available at the right time and place, but issues of uneven coverage and stock shortages were frequently mentioned. These results confirmed that distribution remains a challenge for PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro in meeting consumer expectations (Rachma, 2024).

Responses to product quality variables showed mixed perceptions among consumers. Attributes such as water clarity and taste were generally rated positively, suggesting that the core quality of the product is acceptable. However, packaging design and durability of the bottles received relatively lower ratings, indicating an area that needs improvement. The results suggested that while consumers did not find serious quality defects, the lack of consistent differentiation and weaker brand image compared to competitors reduced their overall confidence in the product (Sobari & Tussoleha Rony, 2025).

In terms of brand awareness, the results highlighted that Prim-A suffers from relatively low consumer recognition in Gunungsitoli. While some respondents recalled the brand when prompted, spontaneous recall was minimal compared to Aqua and Le Minerale. Recognition scores showed that many consumers could identify Prim-A when they saw it, but the brand was rarely at the top of mind. This confirmed that limited branding activities have constrained the visibility of Prim-A in the marketplace (Nhat Vuong et al., 2023).

The measurement model evaluation indicated that all constructs met the requirements for reliability and validity. Convergent validity was achieved as all factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 in the final analysis. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct were above 0.5, confirming the adequacy of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established through Fornell-Larcker and HTMT ratio assessments, demonstrating that each construct was distinct and measured unique aspects of consumer perception.

Construct reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.7, indicating internal consistency of the items measuring distribution, product quality, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions. These results demonstrated that the research instrument was statistically sound and reliable for hypothesis testing. The findings provided confidence that the relationships examined were free from major measurement errors and could be interpreted with accuracy (Duan et al., 2022).

The structural model analysis revealed that distribution had a direct and significant positive effect on purchasing decisions. The path coefficient from distribution to purchase decision was strong, with a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), confirming Hypothesis 1. This suggests that consumers are more likely to purchase Prim-A when the product is widely available and distribution is efficient. Accessibility and timeliness of delivery were critical factors driving consumer decisions in this context.

On the other hand, the relationship between product quality and purchase decision was not significant. The p-value of 0.116 (>0.05) indicated that product quality alone did not directly influence purchasing decisions. This result implied that although consumers generally considered Prim-A's water clarity and taste acceptable, these attributes were insufficient to drive purchasing behavior in the absence of stronger brand recognition. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported in the direct path analysis (Arsawan et al., 2022).

Further analysis showed that product quality significantly influenced brand awareness, with a p-value of 0.000, confirming Hypothesis 4. This means that consumers' positive experiences with the product reinforced their recognition and recall of the brand. Similarly, distribution also significantly influenced brand awareness (p-value = 0.000), supporting Hypothesis 3. These findings demonstrated that both distribution and quality contribute to shaping brand awareness, which in turn affects purchasing decisions.

The mediation test using bootstrapping confirmed that brand awareness fully mediated the relationship between product quality and purchasing decisions. In other words, product quality did not influence purchasing behavior directly but only through its effect on brand awareness. For distribution, however, both direct and mediated effects were observed, with distribution influencing purchase decisions independently and also indirectly via brand awareness. These findings validated Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7, confirming the mediating role of brand awareness and establishing its importance in bridging product attributes and consumer purchasing behavior.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study emphasize the importance of distribution in determining consumer purchasing decisions for bottled water in regional markets such as Gunungsitoli. Distribution showed a significant and positive influence on consumer decisions, supporting the idea that availability and accessibility remain critical in consumer choice (Rahmadani & Schaufeli, 2022). This finding is consistent with prior studies that highlight distribution as a key determinant in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, where products must be available at the right place and time to ensure sales. For Prim-A, this means that expanding distribution networks and ensuring consistent product availability are essential steps to strengthen consumer purchase behavior.

The insignificant direct effect of product quality on purchasing decisions was a surprising but important result. Although consumers acknowledged that the water clarity and taste of Prim-A were acceptable, these attributes alone did not drive them to make a purchase. This suggests that in highly competitive markets, product quality is not sufficient to guarantee consumer choice, especially when competitors like Aqua and Le Minerale have already established stronger brand equity. This aligns with marketing literature which argues that quality is often a necessary but not sufficient condition for consumer loyalty (Aprelyani, 2025).

The full mediation effect of brand awareness in the relationship between product quality and purchasing decisions provides critical insights. It indicates that consumers' recognition of quality only matters when it translates into brand awareness. In practical terms, even if Prim-A offers high-quality products, without brand visibility and consumer recall, the influence of quality will not convert into purchase decisions. This finding underscores the strategic importance of branding activities in ensuring that quality attributes are recognized and valued by consumers (Permata et al., 2025).

On the other hand, distribution influenced purchasing decisions both directly and indirectly through brand awareness. This dual pathway suggests that distribution plays a broader role beyond logistical functions. Effective distribution not only ensures product availability but also reinforces brand presence in the marketplace. Consumers encountering a product more frequently in different locations are more likely to develop brand familiarity and recall, which eventually strengthens purchasing decisions (Stollberger et al., 2023).

The results highlight the competitive disadvantage faced by Prim-A due to low brand awareness. Compared to competitors, the lack of promotional activities and weak brand communication has limited consumer recall. Consumers often choose Aqua or Le Minerale because these brands are not only perceived as widely available but also as more credible and trustworthy. This demonstrates how distribution and quality, without sufficient branding, fail to achieve their maximum potential impact (Sapu et al., 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the mediating role of brand awareness in consumer behavior models. While traditional perspectives often treat quality and distribution as direct determinants of purchasing decisions, this study provides evidence that their impact is contingent upon brand awareness, particularly in regional markets. This enriches consumer behavior theory by demonstrating the importance of psychological constructs in bridging tangible product attributes and decision-making outcomes (Kuo et al., 2022).

The results also provide practical implications for PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro. The company must prioritize improving distribution strategies, ensuring consistent stock availability across all retail outlets, and expanding coverage to new locations. Such measures would not only facilitate direct consumer purchases but also enhance visibility, indirectly strengthening brand awareness. Strategic partnerships with local retailers and aggressive retail penetration campaigns could serve as effective approaches (Elyus et al., 2025).

In terms of product quality, maintaining consistency in taste and clarity remains important, but more attention should be given to packaging and design improvements. Packaging plays a significant role in consumer perception, and enhancing bottle durability, labeling, and aesthetic appeal could differentiate Prim-A from competitors. A product that not only tastes good but also looks appealing increases consumer confidence and contributes to stronger brand associations (Tari et al., 2023).

The findings also point to the urgent need for brand-building initiatives. Since brand awareness was found to fully mediate the relationship between product quality and purchase decisions, PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro should invest in marketing campaigns that highlight the product's unique qualities. Local advertising, sponsorships of community events, and digital campaigns targeting younger consumers could strengthen recognition and recall, making Prim-A a more familiar choice in the consumer's decision set (Eneis et al., 2022).

In addition, brand storytelling strategies may help Prim-A differentiate itself from competitors. While Aqua and Le Minerale already dominate with national-scale branding, Prim-A could leverage its local identity to appeal to community pride and regional values. Positioning the product as a "trusted local brand" may resonate more strongly with consumers in Gunungsitoli and surrounding areas, where local attachment and cultural values are influential.

The dual role of distribution in both direct and indirect pathways also suggests that improving logistics efficiency can yield multiplicative effects. On the one hand, it increases product accessibility, directly influencing purchasing behavior. On the other hand, frequent product encounters reinforce consumer memory, thereby elevating brand awareness. This synergy between logistics and marketing highlights the need for integrated strategies rather than treating distribution and branding as separate functions (Nhat Vuong et al., 2023).

The evidence that product quality alone does not influence decisions but requires brand awareness raises concerns for companies relying solely on functional superiority. In competitive industries such as bottled water, consumers often perceive quality across brands to be relatively homogenous. This makes branding the key differentiator. The implication for Prim-A is clear: quality must be communicated effectively through branding if it is to influence consumer choices. From an academic perspective, the study contributes by confirming and extending previous research on the mediating role of brand awareness (Curado et al., 2022). While studies in urban contexts have demonstrated similar findings, this study confirms that even in smaller regional markets, brand awareness remains critical. This challenges the assumption that local consumers are less brand-conscious, suggesting instead that brand recognition plays a universal role in consumer behavior across market sizes.

Moreover, the study identifies a research gap for future scholars. While this study focused on distribution, product quality, and brand awareness, other factors such as price perception, trust, and digital engagement may also shape purchase decisions. Future studies could expand the model by including these variables, or by comparing consumer behavior across urban and regional markets to highlight differences and similarities. In summary, the discussion demonstrates that distribution remains the strongest driver of purchasing decisions for Prim-A, while product quality exerts influence only when translated into brand awareness (Permata et al., 2025). The findings reaffirm the strategic necessity of strengthening distribution channels and brand-building efforts to ensure long-term competitiveness. Without improving brand visibility, even high-quality products will continue to lag behind better-known competitors in consumer decision-making processes.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that distribution has a direct and significant positive effect on purchasing decisions for Prim-A mineral water, whereas product quality does not directly influence purchasing behavior but requires brand awareness as a full mediator to become effective. Brand awareness also partially mediates the relationship between distribution and purchasing decisions, reinforcing its pivotal role in shaping consumer choices. These findings suggest that PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro should prioritize strengthening its distribution network to ensure consistent product availability while simultaneously investing in brand-building initiatives to enhance consumer recall and recognition. In addition, improving packaging design and emphasizing product quality in marketing communications

would further support brand positioning (Tari et al., 2023). Practically, the company should implement integrated strategies that combine efficient distribution, quality consistency, and targeted promotional campaigns to compete effectively with dominant brands such as Aqua and Le Minerale. Future research is recommended to include variables such as price perception, consumer trust, and digital engagement, which may provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchasing decisions in regional markets. The author would like to express sincere gratitude to God Almighty for His blessings and guidance throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the advisor, Mrs. Idami Harefa, S.E., M.E., for her valuable guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback during the research process. The author is also deeply thankful to the management of PT. Delada Cahaya Mas Agro and the respondents in Gunungsitoli who willingly participated and provided the necessary data. Gratitude is further expressed to the lecturers and academic staff of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias, for their continuous support, as well as to family and friends whose encouragement and prayers have been a constant source of strength. This work would not have been possible without the collective contributions of all those who have assisted in both academic and personal capacities.

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