

Comparative Analysis Of Brand Equity Between Aqua And Le Minerale Bottled Drinking Water Products

Analisis Komparatif Ekuities Merek Antara Produk Air Minum Kemasan Aqua dan Le Minerale

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ABSTRACT

Competition in the bottled mineral water industry in Indonesia is becoming increasingly intense along with the growing public awareness of the importance of consuming safe and healthy drinking water. AQUA, as a pioneer and market leader, faces direct competition from Le Minerale, which has emerged as a challenger brand positioned around product quality and water purity. This study aims to analyze and compare the brand equity of AQUA and Le Minerale bottled mineral water products based on four main dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The population of this study consisted of students at Halu Oleo University who consume bottled mineral water. The sample consisted of 80 respondents determined using the Hair et al. approach. Data were collected through questionnaires using a Likert scale. The data analysis techniques employed were descriptive statistics and the Independent Sample T-Test using SPSS software. The results showed significant differences in brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality between AQUA and Le Minerale. However, no significant difference was found in the brand loyalty dimension. These findings indicate that although AQUA excels in brand recognition and perceived quality, both brands have successfully established relatively comparable consumer loyalty among university students.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty, Bottled Mineral Water

INTRODUCTION

Competition in the packaged beverage industry, particularly bottled mineral water, has increased significantly in recent years due to population growth, urbanization, and rising public awareness regarding healthy lifestyles and safe drinking water consumption [1]. The bottled mineral water industry in Indonesia has become one of the rapidly growing sectors because these products have become daily necessities for modern consumers who prioritize practicality, hygiene, and easy accessibility in their everyday activities [2]. In addition to health factors, changes in consumer consumption patterns have also contributed to the increasing demand for bottled mineral water products [3].

Under highly competitive market conditions, companies no longer rely solely on the functional quality of products but also on brand strength as the main differentiating factor. Bottled mineral water products tend to have relatively homogeneous physical characteristics; therefore, consumers are more likely to consider brand perception during the purchasing decision-making process [4]. Brands have become strategic assets for companies because they can build product identity, image, and consumer trust [5].

According to David A. Aaker, brand equity is a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand that can add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to both the company and consumers [6]. Meanwhile, Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller explain that brand equity is reflected in how consumers think, feel, and act toward a brand [7]. Strong brand equity can increase consumer loyalty, strengthen market positioning, and provide long-term competitive advantages [8].

AQUA is the pioneer of bottled mineral water in Indonesia and has been widely recognized as the market leader in the bottled water industry since 1973 [9]. AQUA's success in maintaining market dominance is strongly supported by its high brand awareness, consistent product quality, and strong brand image embedded in consumers' minds over decades [10]. On the other hand, Le Minerale has emerged as a rapidly growing competitor through aggressive marketing strategies and positioning itself as mineral water with natural minerals and a fresh taste [11].

The competition between AQUA and Le Minerale is interesting to examine because both brands employ different branding approaches. AQUA relies on the strength of historical branding and brand reputation, whereas Le Minerale emphasizes product differentiation and intensive marketing communication through mass and digital media [12]. This condition indicates that competition in the bottled mineral water industry is no longer solely based on price and distribution but also on the company's ability to build strong brand equity [13].

University students represent one of the potential consumer segments in the bottled mineral water industry because they have high mobility and demanding

academic activities. The consumption level of bottled mineral water among students tends to be high due to practicality and the need to maintain health during academic activities [14]. Furthermore, students are generally considered critical and responsive consumers toward marketing strategies, making them a relevant group for measuring product brand equity perceptions [15].

Previous studies regarding brand equity in bottled mineral water products have been widely conducted; however, most studies only focus on a single brand or merely examine the effect of brand equity on purchasing decisions [16]. Comparative studies directly comparing the dimensions of brand equity between AQUA and Le Minerale, particularly among university students, remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study contributes empirically by providing insights into the differences in brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty between the two brands. Based on the explanation above, this study aims to analyze and compare the brand equity of AQUA and Le Minerale bottled mineral water products among students at Universitas Halu Oleo.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand

A brand is an identity used by companies to differentiate their products or services from competitors in the marketplace. According to Kotler and Keller, a brand is not merely a name or symbol but also reflects consumers' perceptions, experiences, and emotional relationships with a product [7]. A strong brand can create added value and increase consumer trust in product quality [17]. Aaker states that a brand is a strategic company asset capable of building customer loyalty and creating sustainable competitive advantages [6]. In industries with homogeneous products such as bottled mineral water, brands become essential factors influencing consumer preferences because products are difficult to differentiate based solely on physical characteristics [18].

Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to a set of brand assets associated with a brand name and symbol that can enhance or reduce product value [6]. Keller explains that brand equity is formed when consumers possess strong levels of brand awareness and brand association toward a particular brand [19]. High brand equity provides several benefits to companies, including increased customer loyalty, effective marketing communication, and stronger market positioning [20]. In the context of the bottled

mineral water industry, brand equity becomes a key factor in maintaining consumers amid the abundance of alternative brands available in the market [21].

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize and recall a brand as part of a particular product category [19]. High levels of brand awareness facilitate consumer purchasing decisions because familiar brands are generally perceived as more trustworthy [22]. Aaker categorizes brand awareness into several levels, ranging from unaware of brand to top-of-mind awareness [6]. In bottled mineral water products, brands with high awareness levels are more likely to be selected during routine purchasing situations [23].

Brand Association

Brand association refers to all impressions, images, and meanings attached to consumers' memories regarding a particular brand [19]. Brand associations may include product attributes, benefits, lifestyle, and quality perceptions [24]. Strong and positive brand associations can enhance product differentiation and strengthen brand positioning in the market [25]. In the bottled mineral water industry, associations such as "pure water," "safe," and "healthy" become important elements in building brand image [26].

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is consumers' perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product compared with competing products [6]. Quality perception is not always based on the objective quality of the product but is also influenced by consumer experience, brand reputation, and marketing communication [27]. In bottled mineral water products, perceived quality is associated with water purity, consumption safety, taste, and production quality standards [28]. The higher consumers' perceptions of a brand's quality, the greater the possibility that they will choose and recommend the brand to others [29].

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is the level of consumer attachment to a particular brand reflected through consistent repeat purchases [6]. Brand loyalty serves as an important indicator of successful brand equity because loyal consumers are generally less likely to switch to competing brands [30]. According to Oliver, customer loyalty is formed through repeated positive experiences and satisfaction with a brand [31]. In the bottled mineral

water industry, loyalty may be influenced by consumption habits, product distribution, and perceptions regarding brand safety and quality [32].

HYPOTHESIS

H1: There is a significant difference in brand awareness between AQUA and Le Minerale.

H2: There is a significant difference in brand association between AQUA and Le Minerale.

H3: There is a significant difference in perceived quality between AQUA and Le Minerale.

H4: There is a significant difference in brand loyalty between AQUA and Le Minerale.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method because it aimed to objectively and systematically measure and compare consumer perceptions regarding the brand equity of two bottled mineral water brands [33]. The quantitative approach was selected because it is capable of generating numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical techniques [34].

The population of this study consisted of students at Universitas Halu Oleo who consume AQUA and Le Minerale bottled mineral water products. Students were selected as research subjects because they represent active consumer groups with relatively high bottled mineral water consumption levels [14]. The sample size was determined using the Hair et al. approach, which recommends a minimum sample size of five times the number of research indicators [35]. This study used 16 indicators, resulting in a total sample size of 80 respondents. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling with the criterion that respondents had consumed both AQUA and Le Minerale within the last three months. Data were collected using questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree [36]. The research variables consisted of:

1. Brand Awareness
2. Brand Association

3. Perceived Quality

4. Brand Loyalty

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to describe respondent characteristics and the Independent Sample T-Test to identify differences in brand equity between AQUA and Le Minerale [37]. Data processing was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Based on the research findings, the majority of respondents were students aged between 18–23 years who consumed bottled mineral water more than once a day. This finding indicates that bottled mineral water has become an important part of students' daily activities, particularly in supporting mobility and academic routines [14].

Descriptive Analysis Results

The descriptive analysis results showed that AQUA obtained higher average scores than Le Minerale in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality. AQUA's high brand awareness indicates that the brand occupies a strong top-of-mind position among consumers [22].

AQUA's superiority in brand association is influenced by its long-established image as a trusted and safe bottled mineral water brand [10]. Consumers tend to associate AQUA with high quality, water purity, and a good corporate reputation [26].

In the perceived quality dimension, AQUA also received higher evaluations compared with Le Minerale. This indicates that consumers perceive AQUA as offering more reliable and consistent product quality [28]. Positive quality perceptions can increase consumer confidence regarding product safety and benefits [27].

However, in the brand loyalty dimension, no significant difference was found between AQUA and Le Minerale. This finding suggests that both brands have successfully built relatively comparable consumer loyalty. Consumer loyalty toward bottled mineral water products is not solely influenced by brand quality but also by consumption habits, product availability, and ease of access [32].

Independent Sample T-Test Results

Table 1. Results of the Independent Sample t-Test

Brand Equity	AQUA	Le Minerale	Mean	t-value	Sig. (2-	Interpretation
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Dimension	Mean	Mean	Difference		tailed)	
Brand Awareness	13.885	12.350	0.925	2.589	0.011	Significant difference
Brand Association	13.225	12.775	1.050	3.192	0.002	Significant difference
Perceived Quality	12.975	11.875	1.050	2.841	0.005	Significant difference
Brand Loyalty	12.500	12.400	0.600	1.226	0.225	No significant difference

Source: Primary Data Processed by the Authors (2026)

Based on the results of the independent sample *t-test* presented in Table 1, several dimensions of brand equity show significant differences between AQUA and Le Minerale. In the *brand awareness* dimension, AQUA recorded a higher mean score (13.885) compared to Le Minerale (12.350). The significance value of 0.011 (< 0.05) indicates a statistically significant difference, suggesting that AQUA has stronger brand awareness among consumers.

Similarly, in the *brand association* dimension, AQUA obtained a mean score of 13.225, which is higher than Le Minerale's mean score of 12.775. The significance value of 0.002 (< 0.05) confirms a significant difference between the two brands. This finding indicates that consumers associate AQUA more strongly and positively than Le Minerale.

For the *perceived quality* dimension, AQUA again showed a higher mean score (12.975) than Le Minerale (11.875). With a significance value of 0.005 (< 0.05), the difference is statistically significant, indicating that consumers perceive AQUA as having better overall quality compared to Le Minerale.

In contrast, the *brand loyalty* dimension did not show a statistically significant difference. Although AQUA achieved a slightly higher mean score (12.500) than Le Minerale (12.400), the significance value of 0.225 (> 0.05) indicates that consumer loyalty toward both brands is relatively similar.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that AQUA significantly outperforms Le Minerale in the dimensions of *brand awareness*, *brand association*, and *perceived quality*. However, no significant difference was identified in the *brand loyalty* dimension between the two brands.

The hypothesis testing results indicated that:

- 1) H1 was accepted, meaning there is a significant difference in brand awareness between AQUA and Le Minerale.
- 2) H2 was accepted, meaning there is a significant difference in brand association between AQUA and Le Minerale.

- 3) H3 was accepted, meaning there is a significant difference in perceived quality between AQUA and Le Minerale.
- 4) H4 was rejected, meaning there is no significant difference in brand loyalty between AQUA and Le Minerale.

These findings reinforce Aaker's theory stating that brand equity consists of several interconnected dimensions influencing brand strength in the market [6]. AQUA excels in awareness and perceived quality because it has a long history as the pioneer of bottled mineral water in Indonesia [9]. Meanwhile, Le Minerale has successfully built consumer loyalty through aggressive marketing strategies and extensive product distribution [11].

This study also demonstrates that consumer loyalty toward homogeneous products such as bottled mineral water is not always determined solely by dominant brand awareness. Consumers may remain loyal to alternative brands as long as the products are easily accessible and capable of fulfilling daily functional needs [30].

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that significant differences exist in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality between AQUA and Le Minerale. AQUA demonstrates superior performance in these three dimensions due to its strong market position as the pioneer of bottled mineral water products in Indonesia. However, no significant difference was found in the brand loyalty dimension between the two brands. This finding indicates that both AQUA and Le Minerale have successfully established relatively similar levels of consumer loyalty among students at Universitas Halu Oleo.

The findings imply that companies need to continuously strengthen branding strategies and maintain product quality in order to sustain brand equity amid increasingly competitive conditions in the bottled mineral water industry.

SUGGESTION

AQUA is recommended to maintain its brand image as a trusted bottled mineral water brand through consistent product quality and sustainable marketing communication strategies. Le Minerale is encouraged to further strengthen brand differentiation through product innovation, packaging development, and marketing communication emphasizing product superiority and water purity. Future studies are expected to

include additional variables such as price perception, green marketing, or environmental concern to enrich studies related to bottled mineral water brand equity.

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