Perception of the Retailers Towards Marketing Mix Strategies: An Empirical Case Study on the Soft Drink Market in Visakhapatnam

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Abstract

Marketing mix is a powerful tool that enables the marketers to concentrate on specific marketing tasks specialization wise (4Ps) and allocate the resources like money, time, and efforts to these tasks to be successful in marketing of products. On the other hand, retailing is the task of selling products to the final customers who are influenced by the marketers or by the retailers to make a purchase. The present case study mainly focuses on retailers' perception of the marketing mix strategies adopted by major players in the Indian soft drink market, that is, Coca-Cola and Pepsi. The study was conducted in Visakhapatnam with an objective of conducting a comparative analysis on the perceptions of the retailers towards the marketing mix strategies adopted by these organizations. The primary data was collected from 100 retailers in Visakhapatnam city who were selling both Coca-Cola and Pepsi products in their outlets. This case study enables the readers to practically analyze how the marketing mix strategies are implemented in the soft drink market and how well the strategies are received by the retailers.

Keywords: retailer perception, soft drink market, marketing mix, promotion mix

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Among all the strategies of marketing management, marketing mix strategies are considered to be important and superior to other strategies of marketing. The study of marketing mix strategies enables the marketers to be successful in marketing of products. Marketing mix is a powerful tool that enables the marketers to concentrate on specific marketing tasks as specialization wise (4Ps) and allocate resources like money, time, and efforts to these tasks to be successful in the market. For this purpose, marketers have to control their marketing activities by comparing the marketing results with the marketing objectives.

On the other hand, retailing is the task of selling the product to the final customer who will be influenced by the marketer or by the retailer to make a purchase. If the marketer's influence is working, the job of the retailer is made easy. If the marketer's influence is not working, then the retailer's job is difficult. Retailers have a direct contact with the customers, and get to know their responses or satisfaction levels, using which they can evaluate the product as well as the marketing strategies of the firm. One of the ways of evaluating the efficiency of marketing activities is to analyze the perception of the retailers towards the marketing mix strategies of the firm. The efficiency of the marketers can be gauged by measuring the perception of the retailers, whether it is good, or average, or poor. The present study concentrates on analyzing the perceptions of the retailers and thereby, would be helpful for the organizations and practitioners to design effective marketing strategies for better market performance.

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Review of Literature

Now let us review the history of the 4 Ps. Borden (1965) claimed to be the first to have used the term “marketing mix” and described “marketing mix” with a set of 12 elements namely - product planning, pricing, branding, channels of distribution, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling, and fact finding and analysis. Frey (1961) suggested that marketing variables should be divided into two parts: The offering (product, packaging, brand, price, and service) and the methods and tools (distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, and publicity). Lazer and Kelly (1962) and Lazer, Culley, and Staudt (1973) suggested three elements of the marketing mix: The goods and services mix, the distribution mix, and the communication mix. McCarthy (1964) regrouped Borden's 12 elements to four elements or 4Ps, namely product, price, promotion, and place at a marketing manger's command to satisfy the target market. Booms and Bitner (1981) added three more Ps to the services marketing mix, namely participants, physical evidence, and process to the original 4 Ps. Kotler (1986) added political power and public opinion formation to the Ps concept. Judd (1987) proposed another P, that is, people to the original 4 Ps.

➲ **Prospects of the Soft Drink Industry :** A soft drink (which includes sodas, pops, soda pop, coke, or any fizzy drink) is a drink that typically contains no alcohol, though may contain small amounts (typically less than 0.5% by volume), and is usually referred to as a sugary drink. Soft drinks are often carbonated and are commonly consumed at chilled or at room temperatures. Some of the most common soft drinks include cola, flavoured water, sparkling water, iced tea, sweet tea, sparkling lemonade (or other lemon-lime soft drinks), squash, fruit punch, root beer, orange soda, grape soda, cream soda, and ginger ale (Datamonitor, 2011). The total market volume for soft drinks market excludes the concentrates category. In 2012, soft drinks registered a stronger double digit off-trade value growth rate than the CAGR (compound annual growth rate). This growth was attributable to strong double-digit performances in categories, such as bottled water and fruit/vegetable juice, which had a good year due to rising mercury levels. Long summers and higher disposable incomes continue to be the main growth drivers of the soft drinks market (Euromonitor, 2013).

The ₹ 50 billion soft drink industry is now growing at the rate of 6% to 7% annually. In India, Coke and Pepsi have a combined market share of around 95% directly or through franchisees. Campa Cola has a 1% share, and the rest is divided among local players. According to industry watchers, fake products also account for a good share of the balance. There are about 110 soft drink producing units (60% being owned by Indian bottlers) in the country, employing about 125,000 people. There are two distinct segments of the market, cola and non-cola drinks. The cola segment claims a share of 62%, while the non-cola segment includes soda, clear lime, cloudy lime, and drinks with orange and mango flavours (NIIR Project Consultancy Services, 2012).

According to NIIR Project Consultancy Services (2012), the market is valued according to retail selling price (RSP) and includes any applicable taxes. The Indian soft drink market generated a total revenue of $3.8 billion in 2010, representing a CAGR of 11% for the period spanning 2006-2010. Carbonate's sales proved the most lucrative for the Indian soft drink market in 2010, generating total revenues of $1.9 billion, equivalent to 50.5% of the market's overall value. The soft drink market is forecasted with an anticipated CAGR of 9.1% for the five-year period from 2010-2015, which is expected to lead the market to a value of $5.9 billion by the end of 2015. It can be said that the soft drink market has contributed well to the GDP of the economy; and it is also satisfying the needs of the consumers. Hence, it is proposed to analyze how the products are being marketed in such a big industry, and the marketing mix strategies followed by the major players of the market, that is, Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

The per-capita consumption of soft drinks in India is around 5 to 6 bottles (same as Nepal's) compared to Pakistan's 17 bottles, Sri Lanka's 21, Thailand's 73, the Philippines 173, and Mexico 605. The industry contributes over ₹ 12 billion to the exchequer and exports goods worth ₹ 2 billion. It also supports growth of industries like glass, refrigeration, transportation, paper, and sugar. The Department of Food Processing Industries stipulated that 'contains-no-fruit-juice' labels be pasted on returnable glass bottles. About 85% of the soft drinks are currently sold in returnable bottles. There was a floating stock of about 1000 million bottles valued at ₹ 6 billion. If the industry were to abide by the new guidelines, it would have to invest in new bottles, resulting in a cost outgo of ₹ 5 billion. Neither Coca-Cola nor Pepsi is in a position to invest such a large amount (NIIR Project Consultancy Services, 2012).

Tough competition between Coca-Cola and PepsiCo continues, not just in carbonates, but in other categories, such as bottled water as well as fruit/vegetable juice. Both companies are strengthening their non-carbonated drinks portfolio as carbonates are slowly losing their sheen to fruit/vegetable juice in urban India According to Euromonitor (2013), independent small grocers continue to lead the distribution of soft drinks. Modern retail outlets are increasing their footprints in urban India, but independent small grocers continue to account for the largest share of sales. This is because of the strong reach of independent small grocers in rural India, which is a potential growth avenue for soft drinks.

Objectives of the Study

(1) To review the prospects of the Indian soft drink market,
(2) To study the marketing mix strategies adopted by the players of the soft drink market,
(3) To analyze the socioeconomic characteristics of the retailers selling soft drink products,
(4) To study the perception of the retailers towards execution of the marketing mix strategies.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Visakhapatnam with an objective of carrying out a comparative analysis on how the retailers perceive the marketing mix strategies adopted by Coca-Cola and Pepsi. The primary data was collected from 100 retailers in Visakhapatnam city during June - August 2013 who were selling both Coca-Cola and Pepsi products in their retail outlets. The perceptions of the retailers were recorded on a 3 point scale, with *poor (1), average (2), and good (3)* on given attributes (practices). The retailers were randomly chosen after judging whether they were selling both Coca-Cola and Pepsi products before offering a schedule. The schedule consisted of dichotomous questions, close-ended questions, open-ended questions, and rating scales for the given attributes.

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Retailers

Variable	Categories of Variable	Frequency
Gender	Male	71%
	Female	29%
Age	15 - 20 years	15%
	21 - 30 years	53%
	31 - 40 years	24%
	41 - 50 years	6%
	above 50 years	2%
Education	Primary Education	7%
	Secondary Education	18%
	Higher Secondary / Diploma / ITI	53%
	Graduation (UG)	19%
	Post Graduation (PG)	3%
Income	Less than ₹ 25,000/-	1%
	Between ₹ 25,000/- and ₹ 50,000/-	49%
	Between ₹ 50,000/- and ₹ 1,00,000/-	44%
	More than ₹ 1,00,000/-	6%

The schedule was designed in such a way that the retailers could provide their perception on the attributes of all 4 P strategies of the soft drink market.

Analysis and Results

➲ **Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Retailers :** The case analysis starts with analyzing the socioeconomic characteristics of the retailers as presented in the Table 1. Out of 100 sample retailers, 71% retailers were male and the remaining were female. In the study area, 15% retailers were in the age group from 15 - 20 years, 53% were in the age group from 21 - 30 years, 24% fell in the age bracket from 31- 40 years, 6% were in the age group of 41 - 50 years, and 2% were above 50 years of age. As far as the educational levels of the retailers are concerned, 7% were educated upto the primary level, 18% possessed secondary level education, 53% were educated upto the higher secondary level, 19% retailers were graduates, and 3% were post graduates. One percent of the retailers had an income level of less than ₹ 25,000 per month, 49% retailers had an income in between ₹ 25,000 - ₹ 50,000, 44% had income from ₹ 50,000 - ₹ 1,00,000, and 6% of the retailers had an income of more than ₹ 1,00,000 per month. Experience in the retailing business was observed to be less than 3 years for 15% of the retailers, 53% of the retailers had an experience of 3 - 5 years, 24% retailers had 5 - 10 years of experience, 6% retailers had 10 - 20 years of experience, and 2% of the retailers had above 20 years of experience as shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Retail Outlets & Experience of the Retailers

Variable	Categories of Variable	Frequency
Experience	Less than 3 years	15%
	3 to 5 years	53%
	5 to 10 years	24%
	10 to 20 years	6%
	above 20 years	2%
Type of Outlet	Pan shop	47%
	Bakery	13%
	Supermarket	12%
	Sweet shop	6%
	Hypermarket	5%
	Cinema Halls	6%
	Restaurants - Eat & Dine	4%
	Restaurants - Take away	5%
	Others	2%

Types of outlets considered for this study were pan shops (47%), bakeries (13%), supermarkets (12%), sweet shops (6%), hypermarkets (5%), cinema halls (6%) , restaurants - eat & dine (4%), restaurants - take away (5%) , and others (2%).

➲ **1st P - Product Strategies :** The perceptions of the retailers were recorded for certain product attributes like quality, BLP strategies, product replacement, services to retailers, and storage facilities. The quality of Coca-Cola products was perceived to be good by 97% of the retailers and average by 3% of the retailers. The quality of Pepsi products was perceived to be good by 58% of the retailers and average by 42% of the retailers. No retailer rated the quality as poor either for Coca-Cola products or for Pepsi products as represented in the Table 3. However, when Pepsi products were pitted against Coca-Cola products, the perception of the retailers towards quality for Pepsi products was perceived to be poor when compared to Coca-Cola products in the study area.

The branding strategies of Coca-Cola products were perceived to be average by 19% of the retailers and good by

Table 3. Product Strategies - 1

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Quality of the Product	
Poor Quality	0%	0%
Average Quality	3%	42%
Good Quality	97%	58%
	Branding Strategies	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	19%	25%
Good	81%	75%
	Labelling Strategies	
Poor	0	0%
Average	25%	27%
Good	75%	73%
	Packaging Strategies	
Poor	2%	0%
Average	10%	29%
Good	88%	71%

Table 4. Product Strategies - 2

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Providing Visi-coolers	
Poor	0%	5%
Average	25%	15%
Good	75%	80%
	Product Replacement	
Poor	62%	8%
Average	30%	31%
Good	8%	61%
	Services to Retailer	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	17%	30%
Good	83%	70%

81% of the retailers ; whereas for Pepsi products, the quality was perceived as average and good by 25% and 75% of the retailers respectively. The retailers perceived the labelling strategies of Coca-Cola products as average (25%) and good (75%) and for Pepsi products, 27% and 73% of the retailers considered the labelling strategies to be average and good respectively. For both branding and labelling strategies, no retailer perceived the strategies of both the Cola giants to be poor. As far as packaging strategies are concerned, they were perceived as poor for Coca-Cola products by 2% of the retailers and for Pepsi products, no retailer perceived the packaging strategies to be poor. The packaging strategies were perceived as average by 10% and 29% of the retailers for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products respectively. Furthermore, 88% and 71% of the retailers perceived the packaging strategies to be good for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products respectively.

In the soft drink industry, it is a common practice that the manufacturers provide visi-coolers (fridge/storage facility) to the retailers on a conditional basis that the retailer should not keep the competitors' products in the visi-coolers, that is, if Coca-Cola company offers a visi-cooler to any retailer, he/she should not put any Pepsi products in it. Offering a visi-cooler is a patronage factor for the retailers, offered by the manufacturers, to sell their products. On being offered visi-coolers by the said companies, 75% and 80% of the retailers perceived this initiative as good, and 25% and 15% of the retailers of Coca-Cola and Pepsi products considered this move to be average respectively. Only 5% of the retailers of Pepsi products considered this move to be poor.

The retailers considered the product replacement strategies of Pepsi to be better than what they were for Coca-Cola. Only 8% of the retailers were of the opinion that the product replacement strategies of Coca-Cola were good ; whereas, in case of 61% of the retailers, the same were considered to be good in case of Pepsi. On the contrary, only 8% of the retailers perceived the product replacement strategies of Pepsi to be poor ; whereas, 62% of the retailers perceived the product replacement strategies of Coca-Cola to be poor. Therefore, it can be ascertained from the responses of the retailers that Coca-Cola has to restructure its product replacement strategies as majority of the retailers were dissatisfied with the same. The product replacement process was being delayed by Coca-Cola, as reported by the retailers in the study area. The services provided to the retailers were perceived as average by 17% and 30% of the retailers in case of Coca- Cola and Pepsi respectively, and were perceived to be good by 83% and 70% of the retailers in case of Coca- Cola and Pepsi respectively (Table 4).

Table 5. Pricing Strategies - 1

Margin in ₹	Coke	Pepsi
	Profit Margin on 200ml	
Less than ₹ 1/-	0%	0%
₹ 1/-	100%	100%
More than ₹ 1/-	0%	0%
	Profit Margin on 300ml	
₹ 1.5/-	100%	0%
₹ 2/-	0%	98%
₹ 2.5/-	0%	2%
	Profit Margin on 500ml	
₹ 2.5/-	100%	0%
₹ 3.5/-	0%	98%
₹ 4/-	0%	2%

Table 6. Pricing Strategies - 2

Margin in ₹	Coke	Pepsi
	Profit Margin on 1 litre	
₹ 3.5/-	100%	0%
₹ 4.5/-	0%	100%
More than ₹ 4.5/-	0%	0%
	Profit Margin on 2 litre	
₹ 4.8/-	100%	0%
₹ 5/-	0%	98%
More than ₹ 5/-	0%	2%
	Profit Margin on Tin Can	
₹ 1/-	0%	27%
₹ 1.5/-	0%	71%
₹ 1.75/-	0%	2%
₹ 2/-	100%	0%

➲ **2nd P – Price Strategies :** In this section, an attempt has been made to analyze the profit margins given to the retailers by the Cola companies. The profit margins of different products in the product lines analyzed were 200ml, 300ml, 500ml, 1 litre, 2 litre, and tin can. For 200 ml, the profit margin offered was ₹ 1 as agreed by 100% of the retailers for both the Cola companies (Table 5). The profit margin on 300ml was ₹1.5 for Coca-Cola products as reported by 100% of the retailers and ₹ 2 and ₹ 2.5 for Pepsi products as reported by 98% and 2% of the retailers of Pepsi. It can be inferred from the Table that as compared to Coca-Cola, Pepsi offered greater profit margins to the retailers. But still, the retailers preferred to stock and sell Coca-Cola products, as these products have good demand in the market. The profit margin on 500ml (pet bottle) was ₹ 2.5 for Coca-Cola products (as reported by 100% of the retailers), ₹ 3.5 (reported by 98% of the retailers) and ₹ 4 (reported by 2% of the retailers) for Pepsi products. For 1 litre (fridge pack), the profit margin was ₹ 3.5 for Coca-Cola products (as reported by 100% of the retailers) and ₹ 4.5 for Pepsi products (as reported by 100% of the retailers). Profit margin on 2 litre (party pack) was ₹ 4.8 for Coca - Cola products (as reported by 100% of the retailers), ₹ 5 for Pepsi products (as reported by 98% of the retailers), and more than ₹ 5 (as reported by 2% of the retailers) as represented in the Table 6. Hence, it can be observed that there was no variation in profit margins offered to retailers of Coca-Cola products, whereas there was

Table 7. Place Strategies

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Availability of Product	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	7%	26%
Good	93%	74%
	Transportation Facility	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	0%	0%
Good	100%	100%
	Order Delivery	
Within 1 day	53%	51%
Within 2 days	32%	43%
Within 3 days	9%	6%
Within 4 days	6%	0%

variation in profit margins offered to retailers of Pepsi products.

The profit margin on tin can (aluminium pack) was ₹ 2/- for Coca-Cola products (as reported by 100 % of the retailers) and in case of Pepsi products, the profit margin was ₹1 (as reported by 27 % of the retailers), ₹ 1.5 (as reported by 71% of the retailers), and ₹1.75 (as reported by 2 % of the retailers). Surprisingly, Coca-Cola was offering more profit margin than Pepsi on tin cans of its products. Therefore, it can be inferred from the analysis that Coca-Cola company is following the pull market strategy due to good demand in the market , whereas Pepsi is following the push market strategy due to low demand in the market (as compared to Coca-Cola products).

➲ **3rd P – Place Strategies :** In this section, an attempt has been made to analyze the distribution strategies of the soft drink companies. As soft drinks are fast moving consumer products, the companies were following intensive distribution strategy where the product availability is planned in every available outlet. The soft drinks are available in outlets like pan shops, bakeries, supermarkets, sweet shops, hypermarkets, cinema halls, restaurants - eat & dine, restaurants - take away, and so forth. The product availability was perceived to be average by 7% of the retailers (in case of Coca-Cola products) and 26% retailers (in case of Pepsi products). The product availability was perceived to be good by 93% retailers (in case of Coca-Cola products) and 74% retailers (in case of Pepsi products) as represented in the Table 7.

The duration of order delivery was also analyzed in the study area. The order delivery for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products happened within 1 day as reported by 53% and 51% of the retailers respectively. The orders for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products were delivered within 2 days as reported by 32% and 43% of the retailers respectively. The order delivery for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products happened within 3 days as reported by 9% and 6% of the of retailers respectively. The order delivery for Coca-Cola and Pepsi products happened within 4 days as reported by 6% and 0% of the retailers respectively. Hence, it can be observed that almost both the players were taking the same duration for delivering the orders, but the retailers expected that the orders should be delivered as soon as possible.

➲ **4th P – Promotion Strategies :** In this section, the promotion mix strategies of the concerned soft drink players are analyzed. The promotion mix tools practiced in the study area are advertising, sales promotion, publicity, and personal selling. The retailers were asked to give their views about the impact of promotion strategies on improving sales of the products. As far as advertising is concerned, various media vehicles used by Coca-Cola and Pepsi to deliver the advertising messages are TV, radio, the Internet, hoardings, posters, signage boards, wall

Table 8. Promotion Strategies - Advertising 1

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	TV Advertisements	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	48%	59%
Good	52%	41%
	Radio Advertisements	
Poor	38%	40%
Average	45%	36%
Good	17%	24%
	Internet Advertisements	
Poor	52%	50%
Average	21%	26%
Good	27%	24%

Table 9. Promotion Strategies - Advertising 2

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Hoardings ads	
Poor	4%	9%
Average	67%	60%
Good	29%	31%
	Poster ads	
Poor	2%	1%
Average	11%	13%
Good	87%	86%
	Signage Boards	
Poor	1%	5%
Average	26%	18%
Good	73%	77%

paintings, ads on visi-coolers, and t-shirts.

The effectiveness of TV advertisements of Coca-Cola products was perceived to be average by 48% of the retailers and good by 52% of the retailers. Pepsi ads were perceived as average by 59% of the retailers and good by 41% of the retailers. The effectiveness of radio advertisements of Coca-Cola products was perceived as poor by 38% of the retailers, average by 45% of the retailers, and good by 17% of the retailers. Pepsi ads were perceived as poor by 40% of the retailers, average by 36% of the retailers, and good by 24% of the retailers. The effectiveness of Internet advertisements of Coca-Cola products was perceived as poor by 52% of the retailers, average by 21% of the retailers, and good by 27% of the retailers. Pepsi ads were perceived as poor by 50% of the retailers, average by 26% of the retailers, and good by 24% of the retailers as shown in the Table 8.

It was revealed that the radio and Internet advertisements need to be improved to have a good impact on the sales as per the perception of the retailers. Hoarding advertisements are placed by the companies in the form of billboards, e-billboards, and so forth. The hoarding ads were perceived as poor by 4% of the retailers, average by 67% of the retailers, and good by 29% of the retailers for Coca-Cola products. The hoarding ads were perceived as poor by 9% retailers, average by 60% of the retailers, and good by 31% of the retailers for Pepsi products. Hence, it

Table 10. Promotion Strategies - Advertising 3

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Paintings	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	20%	20%
Good	80%	80%
	Ads on Visi-Coolers	
Poor	4%	0%
Average	7%	20%
Good	89%	80%
	T-Shirts	
Poor	13%	14%
Average	23%	22%
Good	64%	64%

Table 11. Promotion Strategies - Sales Promotion

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Coupons	
Poor	0%	1%
Average	77%	69%
Good	23%	30%
	Holiday Trips	
Poor	71%	58%
Average	11%	23%
Good	18%	19%
	Offers & Discounts	
Poor	10%	4%
Average	70%	10%
Good	20%	86%

is clear that the companies need to provide effective hoarding ads in order to attract more number of customers.

Poster advertisements are placed in restaurants, canteens, cinema halls, bakeries, supermarkets, and departmental stores. The poster ads were perceived as poor by 2% of the retailers, average by 11% of the retailers, and good by 87% of the retailers for Coca-Cola products. The hoarding ads were perceived as poor by 1% retailers, average by 13% retailers, and good by 86% of the retailers for Pepsi products. It can be noticed that the retailers had a positive perception towards hoarding ads of both the Cola giants. Signage boards are also given to the retailers by the companies (with the name of the Cola company in big letters along with the name of the retail outlet in small letters). In case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi signage boards, the ads were considered to be good by 73% and 77% of the retailers respectively, average by 26% and 18% of the retailers respectively, and poor by 1% and 5% of the retailers respectively (Table 9). It can be observed that signage board ads were well received by the retailers.

Paint ads are another advertising strategy of the soft drink players. The companies paint their ads on the walls of canteens, restaurants, and even on the walls of households. From the Table 10, it can be inferred that 80% of the retailers of both Pepsi and Coca-Cola perceived as these ads as good and 20% of the retailers perceived these ads to be average. Hence, it can be concluded that the paint ads were well perceived by the retailers of both the Cola companies.

The advertisements are even placed on the visi-coolers. The retailers' perception towards visi-cooler ads of Coca- Cola and Pepsi was good in case of 89% and 80% of the retailers of the respective Cola brands, the ads were perceived to be average by 7% and 20% of the retailers , and poor by 4% and 0% of the retailers respectively (Table 10). Hence, it can be observed that visi-cooler ads were well perceived by the retailers.

The Cola brands also print advertisements on t-shirts for promoting their products and these t-shirts are distributed to their employees, customers, retailers, middlemen, and so forth for promotion of their brand(s). This is often referred to as speciality media. The retailers' perception towards t-shirt ads was good in case of 64% of the retailers for both the Cola brands ; 23% and 22% of the retailers considered the ads to be average, and 13% and 14% of the retailers considered these ads to be poor in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. Hence, it is clear that the retailers were not really happy with the t-shirt ads and also, it was found that the retailers were asking for more t-shirts from the companies.

Sales promotion is the process of offering temporary benefits and discounts to the retailers and customers to boost up the sales. Various sales promotion techniques followed by the companies are providing coupons, holiday trips, offers and discounts. Coupons are one of the sales promotion tools used by the players in the soft drink market ; if any retailer sold out a certain stock level, then they are provided coupons, which enable them to get either monetary or non-monetary benefits. Twenty three percent and 30% of the retailers considered the coupons to be good and 77% and 69% of the retailers considered the coupons to be average in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi brands

Table 12. Promotion Strategies - Publicity

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Events Organized	
Poor	10%	37%
Average	70%	43%
Good	20%	20%
	Latest News in Media	
Poor	50%	54%
Average	28%	40%
Good	22%	6%
	Road Shows	
Poor	2%	10%
Average	36%	24%
Good	62%	66%

respectively (Table 11). It can be concluded that the retailers perceived the coupons provided by the soft drink companies to be good.

Holiday trips are another sales promotion technique used by the companies to motivate the retailers to increase their sales volumes. Majority of the retailers perceived the holiday trips as poor (71% and 58% retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively), 11% and 23% of the retailers perceived them to be average, and 18% and 19% of the retailers perceived them to be poor in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. Hence, it can be identified that the retailers were not happy with the holiday trips provided by both the companies. The companies need to redesign the holiday packages as they are one of the motivating factors for many retailers to give a better sales performance.

Offers and discounts are another sales promotion practice in the soft drink industry; the discounts can be in form of cash or stock discounts. The retailers' perception towards offers and discounts was perceived as good in case of 20% and 86% retailers, as average in case of 70% and 10% retailers, and poor in case of 10% and 4% retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi products respectively. Hence, it can be observed that the retailers were happy with the offers and discounts given by Pepsi and they were not enthusiastic with offers and discounts given by Coca-Cola company.

Publicity is the act of attracting media attention and gaining visibility with the public. Various publicity activities are events-organized, news-in-media, and road-shows. The retailers' perception towards events-organized as part of the publicity campaign was perceived as good in case of 20% of the retailers each, as average in case of 70% and 43% of the retailers, and poor in case of 10% and 37% of the retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively (Table 12). Hence, it can be inferred that the retailers had a mixed perception towards events organized by the Cola companies for the publicity of their products.

Another form of publicity adopted by the soft drink vendors is news-in-media. The retailers' perception towards media-news as part of publicity campaigns was good in case of 22% and 6% of the retailers, was average in case of 28% and 40% of the retailers, and was poor in case of 50% and 54% of the retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. Hence, it is clear that the retailers were not quite happy with the publicity of the products in the form of news. The companies need to telecast/publish more news about their products in media.

Road-shows are another publicity tool used by the soft drink vendors. The retailers' perception towards road-shows was good in case of 62% and 66% of the retailers, was average in case of 36% and 24% of the retailers, and was poor in case of 2% and 10% of the retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. It can be observed that the retailers were happy with the road shows organized by the Cola companies.

Personal selling is another promotion technique, which is used by the soft drink market players. The retailers were questioned about the presentation skills of the sales personnel of the companies. The retailers' perception

Table 13. Promotion Strategies - Personal Selling

Perceptions	Coke	Pepsi
	Sales Force Presentation Skills	
Poor	2%	0%
Average	13%	16%
Good	85%	84%
	Invoice/Order Taking	
Poor	0%	0%
Average	20%	20%
Good	80%	80%
	Claim Settlements	
Poor	48%	50%
Average	40%	32%
Good	12%	18%
	Damaged Products	
Poor	72%	9%
Average	24%	28%
Good	4%	63%
	Conflict Management	
Poor	58%	59%
Average	36%	38%
Good	6%	3%

about the presentation skills of the sales personnel was good in case of 85% and 84% of the retailers, was average in case of 13% and 16% of the retailers, and was poor in case of 2% and 0% of the retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively (Table 13). Hence, it can be inferred that majority of the retailers were happy with the presentation skills of the sales personnel of both the companies.

The retailers' perception on invoice/order taking skills of the sales personnel was also considered. The retailers' perception about the invoice/order taking skills of the sales personnel was good in case of 80% (each) of the retailers of both the cola brands and the same was average in case of 20% (each) of the retailers of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. Hence, it can be inferred that the retailers were satisfied with the invoice/order taking skills of the sales personnel of the respective cola brands.

Claim settlements by the sales personnel is another parameter that determines the effectiveness of the personal selling process, where the retailers expect that the claims are settled in minimum time with maximum benefit. The retailers' perception towards claim settlement was good in case of 12% and 18% of the retailers, was average in case of 40% and 32% of the retailers, and was poor in case of 48% and 50% of the retailers in case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. This indicates that the retailers were not happy with the claim settlement process followed by both the companies. Hence, the companies need to speed up the claim settlement process to increase the satisfaction level of the retailers.

The retailers' perception towards a company is also influenced by the handling/replacement of the damaged products (which get damaged in transit). The retailers wanted the damaged products to be replaced without suffering any monetary losses. The retailers' perception towards handling the damaged products was good in case of 4% and 63% of the retailers, was average in case of 24% and 28% of the retailers, and was poor in case of 72% and 9% of the retailers of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively . Hence, it can be inferred that the retailers were not happy with the handling of damaged products by Coca-Cola company, and were quite satisfied with the handling of the damaged products by Pepsi.

Conflict management is another motivating factor for the retailers to perform better. Conflicts can be horizontal or vertical or within the same level or across the levels, that is, conflict can be between a retailer and the company, or between a retailer and a wholesaler, or between a distributor and a retailer, and so forth. The retailers' perception towards conflict management was good in case of 6% and 3% of the retailers, was average in case of 36% and 38% of the reailers, and was poor in case of 58% and 59% of the retailers for Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. The conflict management skills of the executives of both Coca-Cola and Pepsi were perceived to be poor by majority of the retailers. Hence, the companies need to improve the conflict management skills of their personnel by providing appropriate training and development programs to their employees.

Managerial Implications

(1) Branding strategies of the cola companies need to be improved. Huge product choice is being offered to the consumers, and the consumers are showing variety seeking buying behaviour ; less loyalty is shown by the consumers towards any soft drink brand. Therefore, the branding strategies should aim at converting the variety seeking buying behaviour into habitual buying behaviour.

(2) Packaging strategies of the soft drink products seem to be good because the consumers are able to identify the packages/bottles with the label pasted/printed on them. But the packing strategies of the products need to be improved. For any reason, if the soft drink products are damaged during transit, then the companies should replace the damaged products after proper inquiry, without causing any monetary losses to the retailers, as the retailers communicated their dissatisfaction with the product replacement policy of the cola giants.

(3) Services to the retailers by the manufacturers should be evaluated from time to time and must be redesigned and offered according to the needs of the retailers as retail services play a major role in recommending the products to the customers and can increase retail sales.

(4) Order delivery from the manufacturer/middlemen to the consumer should be as promised - transportation duration, cost, and availability must be as per prior discussions, terms and conditions. If the manufacturer/middlemen is not able to deliver the order on time, then that must be communicated to the retailer in advance.

(5) The players in the soft drink market have to lay special emphasis on radio advertising because consumers now-a-days have cell phones that are equipped with radios. Moreover, the perception of the retailers towards radio advertisements was not good as per the present study. The marketers of soft drink brands have to determine the time slots for airing the radio advertisements for the target consumers.

(6) Internet advertisements like banner ads inside mail accounts, pop-up ads, panel ads, home page ads on popular websites, email advertisements, and so forth need to be placed strategically to stimulate impulse buying. The soft drink players need to come up with new strategies for advertising their products on social media.

(7) Other advertising tools in the soft drink market like hoarding ads, poster ads, signage boards, paint ads, ads on visi-coolers were giving good results as the retailers had a positive perception about the same. Soft drink players can advertise on speciality media like printing logos/product images on t-shirts, caps, bracelets, watches, goggles, clothes, footwear, and so forth.

(8) The sales promotion schemes like coupons, holiday trips, offers and discounts had a positive perception in the retailers' minds, but when asked about claim settlement, the retailers were dissatisfied with the same. If the claims are not settled on time, this will impact the sales as the retailers become reluctant to promote the products, which affects the market share of the soft drink players.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study is limited to the retail outlets of Visakhapatnam city only and the results cannot be generalized for other states and cities in India. The study is confined to the marketing mix strategies of soft drink retailers only. The retailers of other products were not considered for the present study. Furthermore, the retailers selling branded soft drinks were only considered for this study, and the retailers selling unbranded soft drinks were not considered.

Researchers in the future can extend the present study to other cities of India. The marketing mix strategies discussed in the present paper were identified from observations in retail outlets of Visakhapatnam city only. However, there may be more marketing mix strategies used in other areas, which can be applied to future studies in this context. Furthermore, the same study can be replicated across the world because the soft drink market has its presence all over the world. The evaluation of the marketing mix strategies by the retailers can be applied to other manufactured products, consumer durables, consumer electronics, automobiles, fast moving consuming goods, and so forth for effective marketing and retailing strategies. Finally, to conclude, I would like to say that the marketing strategies are like pillars for the success or failure of any product. The retailers' perception of the marketing mix strategies adopted by an organization for its products acts as a benchmark for the effectiveness of the marketing practices.

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