

Social phenomenon of bottled water consumption in Sri Lanka: Hypes and reality

N N R N Nugera¹, M K N Kumari² and L M Abeywickrama^{3*}

¹ Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Kamburupitiya

² Department of Agricultural Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Kamburupitiya

³ Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Kamburupitiya

The world bottled water market amounted to an annual volume of more than 89 billion litres. At present, the annual compound growth rate (CGR) of bottled water consumption in the world is about 10.4 percent while in the Asian region, it is 26 percent. Although, in the Asian region, the annual per-capita consumption of bottle water consumption remains at lower level (3 litres per head per year), environmental and sanitary problems associated with careless disposal of empty bottles are increasing at an alarming rate with the dramatic growth of consumption of bottled water in the region. In Sri Lanka, there are more than 300 companies which produce bottled water in different scales and brands, with only 14 companies that have obtained SLS standards. The objectives of the study were: (1) to find an overview of the bottled water market, (2) to find attitudes of people towards consumption of bottled water, and (3) potential environmental and health hazards of using bottled water.

A sample of 125 respondents representing different categories of the society was interviewed for primary data by using a pre-tested questionnaire. In addition to the consumers, 30 retail outlets of bottled water were investigated to find the ways of displaying and storing of water bottles. The importance of different criteria in purchasing bottled water was ranked from 0 (not important) to 4 (extremely important) according to consumers' view and the Kruskal-Wallis one way rank ANOVA was used as analytical tool.

Sogo, American, Fern, Ice-mountain, Harvest, Safari were the main brands of bottled water in the market. According to the traders, consumers consider appearance and cleanliness of the bottle when purchasing, but not whether the bottles were exposed to the sun or assurance of the cleanliness of the storing place. Most of the people use bottled water for long distance traveling and when there is no alternative reliable water source. People mostly prefer medium sized, thick, light blue, round, normal (not chilled) bottles with light blue labels. About 89 percent of the respondents believe that the bottled water is safer than other sources, free from micro-organisms and adverse chemical compounds.

When buying bottled water, priority is given to the factors such as expiry date, SLS, seal of bottle, absence of inner material and outer cleanliness, but not the composition, place of storage, trade name and source of water.

As people have misconception about purity and sanitation of bottled water, the industry is flourishing despite environmental problems associated with the industry and several uncontrolled bogus filling of unhygienic water into the bottles.

* abey@agecon.ruh.ac.lk

Tel: 041-2292200