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‘To Improve the Sales and Retail Presence of the Pepsi Products’

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ABSTRACT :

This research paper presents a field-based analysis of PepsiCo's retail performance across five high-demand Mumbai localities i.e. Bandra, Santacruz, Khar Road, Andheri, and Jogeshwari, conducted during a summer internship with Varun Beverages Ltd. Using Google Form responses, store audits, and interactions with retailers and PSRs, the study identifies strong demand for products like Sting, Pepsi Blue, Dukes Soda, and Nimbooz.

However, PepsiCo's growth is limited by major operational issues including irregular deliveries, delayed restocking, unstable margins, slow Visi Cooler placements, poor promotional activity, outdated tracking apps, no credit support, and weak expired-product return systems. These gaps reduce retailer trust and hinder sales.

Competition from Coca-Cola, Parle Agro, and especially the aggressively expanding Campa Cola further intensifies pressure through better margins, faster cooler deployment, and stronger retailer engagement.

Despite challenges, retailers expressed willingness to prioritize PepsiCo if delivery consistency improves, pricing stabilizes, communication strengthens, and promotions increase.

Overall, the study offers actionable recommendations for PepsiCo and VBL to optimize distribution, enhance on-ground execution, support retailers more effectively, and strengthen their competitive position in Mumbai's FMCG market.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian real estate market is rapidly evolving, with pre-launch and under-construction sales becoming a major trend. Unlike traditional purchases, buyers here must commit without seeing a completed property no show flats, no construction site, only plans and digital renderings. In this high-risk environment, **trust** becomes the core factor influencing buyer decisions.

Real estate salespersons play a crucial role in building this trust. Their communication, credibility, emotional connection, and ability to address doubts often influence buyers more than the developer's brand itself. At the same time, buyers have become more cautious and informed due to digital access and regulations like RERA, which have increased transparency but also expectations.

This study examines how salespersons establish trust in uncertain, pre-launch scenarios and what psychological, communicative, and strategic techniques they use to convert leads. It also explores what drives buyer decisions emotional rapport, brand reputation, peer recommendations, price, documentation, or possession assurance.

By analysing insights from developers, sales teams, and buyers, the study aims to clarify what truly builds trust in pre-launch real estate. The findings offer practical guidance for industry stakeholders looking to strengthen credibility and succeed in this high-trust, high-stakes segment.

Review of the Literature:

Existing literature on the soft drink industry highlights the importance of brand awareness, visibility, and strategic marketing in driving sales. Studies show that strong brand salience (Yadavalli et al., 2021) and effective in-store placement or promotion (Foster et al., 2014) significantly influence consumer purchases, while visual merchandising and store display strategies (Saldanha et al., 2021) improve retail performance. Comparative research on PepsiCo and Coca-Cola (Gupta & Neelesh, 2010; Dai, 2021; Štofová & Kopčáková, 2021) consistently demonstrates intense competition shaped by pricing, marketing decisions, and distribution strength. Customer-focused studies find that advertising (Jaitain et al., 2013), pricing stability (Kiiru et al., 2017), and consumer perception or loyalty (Priyanka, 2023) are central to influencing buying behavior. Meanwhile, research on operational efficiency and retail engagement (Siddique et al., 2024; Khan & Raza, 2023) emphasizes the need for strong supply chain management and retailer support. Additional literature highlights the role of product innovation (Putri, 2024), sustainability initiatives (Kumari & Nair, 2024), and shifting consumer preferences especially post-pandemic toward local or value-based beverages (Naaz & Shueb, 2021; Praveen & McLaughlin, 2022). Overall, the literature shows that brand visibility, consistent distribution, pricing discipline, and consumer engagement collectively determine sales outcomes in the beverage sector.

Objectives :

The primary goal of this research was to assess the retail presence, performance, and operational efficiency of PepsiCo products in Mumbai under Varun Beverages Ltd. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Identify the top-selling PepsiCo SKUs and regional product preferences across outlet types.

2. Examine product visibility, in-store branding, and Visi Cooler penetration and their impact on sales.
3. Evaluate supply chain efficiency, delivery timelines, and challenges caused by PSRs and Delivery Agents.
4. Measure retailer satisfaction with margins, pricing stability, promotions, and support systems.
5. Analyse competition from Coca-Cola, Parle Agro, and Campa Cola in terms of visibility, distribution, and engagement.
6. Gather retailer suggestions to improve PepsiCo's retail presence and sales performance.
7. Develop strategic recommendations for VBL and PepsiCo to enhance operations, strengthen retailer relationships, and expand distribution coverage.

Methodology Employed:

This study adopts a *qualitative, exploratory methodology* to understand the ground realities affecting the sales performance and retail presence of PepsiCo products under Varun Beverages Ltd. (VBL). A *case study approach* was used across key Mumbai retail zones Bandra, Andheri, Santacruz, Jogeshwari, and Khar Road chosen for their high market activity and diverse consumer profiles. This enabled the study to capture region-specific retailer behaviour, demand patterns, and competitive dynamics.

Primary data was collected through a *structured Google Form* administered during field visits over a three-month internship. The questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended questions, providing measurable inputs as well as rich qualitative insights on product availability, visibility, delivery efficiency, promotions, and competitive impact. These responses were supplemented with *systematic field observations*, offering contextual understanding of retail practices, communication gaps, and on-ground execution.

All data was thematically coded and analyzed to identify patterns related to distribution efficiency, retailer satisfaction, competition, branding, and supply chain consistency. Guided by an *interpretivist philosophy*, the methodology focused on understanding lived experiences rather than numerical generalization, allowing the study to generate practical, actionable insights for improving VBL's retail operations and market performance.

Project Design:

The research project is structured in order to know the responses targeting the category of the retailers in the areas mentioned:

Retailers : The research was aimed to know the details of the outlets, with questions regarding the PepsiCo share in the outlet and Coca-Cola's share in the outlet, which brand of Visi Cooler is being used by the retailer, if the Visi Cooler is of PepsiCo, then to see to it that apt level of Visi Purity is maintained according to the regulations, the number of SKU's the retailer has of PepsiCo and to record the highest selling SKU of the Company as well, lastly noting down the problems faced by the customer regarding PepsiCo's Services and also the suggestions if any from the retailer himself in order to boost the sales of VBL in that particular outlet and in that assigned area as well.

Questionnaire Structure:

A structured Google Form was used to collect insights from retailers in Bandra, Andheri, Santacruz, Jogeshwari, and Khar Road. The questionnaire captured basic retailer details, the PepsiCo products they stocked, their highest-selling SKUs, and competing brands performing well in the area. Retailers were asked about delivery issues, stock availability, and other operational challenges through open-ended questions. The form also assessed visibility factors such as Visi Cooler ownership, willingness to accept a cooler, and satisfaction with PepsiCo's promotional support. Overall, the questionnaire was designed to gather qualitative, actionable feedback to improve PepsiCo's retail presence and service efficiency in the selected regions.

Data Collection:

Data was collected through digital survey distribution, primarily using Google Forms. The data for this research was personally collected by me through a self-designed Google Form, where I recorded direct responses from retailers based on a set of structured questions aimed at understanding their experience, challenges, and feedback related to PepsiCo products.

Sample Size and Sampling Method:

- Customers or Retailers – 155 Valid Responses

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling

The sampling was restricted to respondents within the Mumbai due to logistical and time limitations. Despite this limitation, the responses from various regions of Mumbai provided valuable insights towards the study.

Conclusion of Methodological Approach

The research adopted a qualitative exploratory methodology, designed to gain first-hand insights into retailer perspectives, challenges, and suggestions related to the sales and visibility of PepsiCo products in key Mumbai localities, namely Bandra, Andheri, Santacruz, Jogeshwari, and Khar Road. Data was collected through a self-administered Google Form, comprising both structured and open-ended questions. This allowed for a deeper understanding of on-ground realities, such as supply chain issues, consumer preferences, pricing competition, and retailer-brand relationships.

The responses were systematically compiled and analyzed using descriptive techniques and thematic categorization, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and actionable feedback. By directly involving retail stakeholders in the process, the methodology ensured practical relevance and operational validity. The case-based approach, rooted in real-world retail scenarios, enriched the study's findings and served as a foundation for data-driven recommendations aimed at enhancing PepsiCo's market presence.

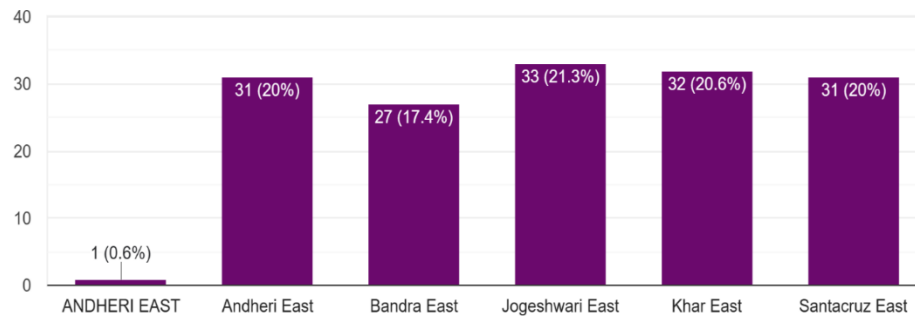
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION :

Retailer's Survey :

Question 1. The Locality covered

Locality

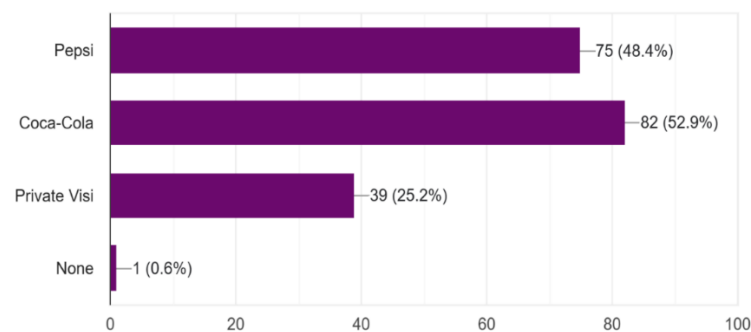
155 responses



- Responses were collected from Andheri East, Bandra East, Jogeshwari East, Khar East, and Santacruz East.
- Covering diverse areas helped capture varied consumer behaviour, retailer challenges, and market conditions.

Which Visi Cooler does the retailer has ?

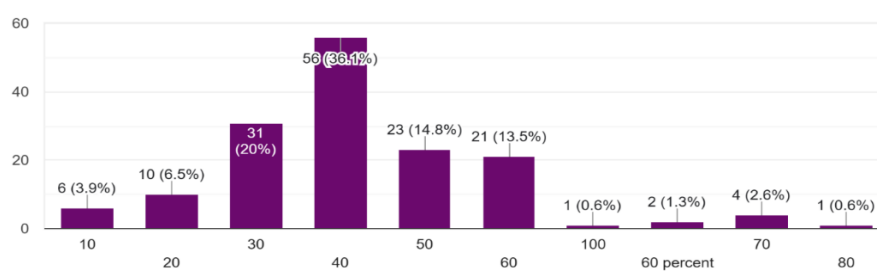
155 responses



- Among 155 retailers, 75 have PepsiCo Visis while 82 have Coca-Cola Visis, showing strong competition in cooler placement.
- Some shops use both brands' coolers, and 39 rely on private Visis.
- Cooler availability is crucial as it directly boosts product visibility and sales.

Pepsi's Share in the outlet (in %)

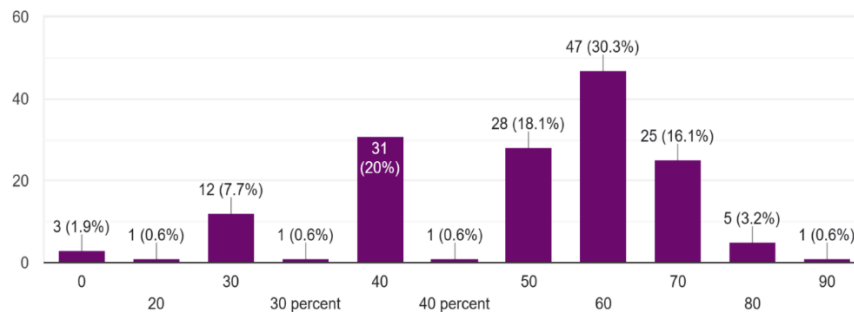
155 responses



- Most outlets have **20–40% PepsiCo market share**, with 56 outlets at 40% and 31 outlets at 20%, showing moderate penetration.
- Only a small number—23 outlets at 60% and 4 outlets at 70%—show strong PepsiCo dominance.
- VBL should prioritize improving share in outlets currently in the **30–40% range** to boost overall penetration.

Coca-Cola's share in the outlet (in %)

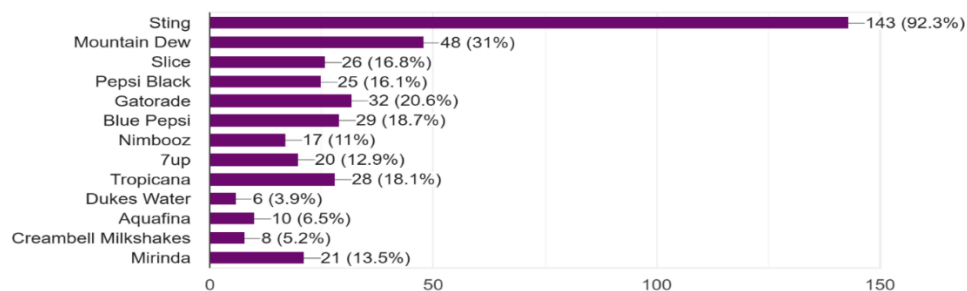
155 responses



- Coca-Cola shows strong penetration: 47 outlets have ~60% share, 25 outlets have ~70%, and 28 outlets have ~50% share.
- Very few outlets have less than 30% Coca-Cola share, indicating its dominant market presence compared to PepsiCo.
- SKU analysis shows many retailers stock only a limited number of PepsiCo SKUs, revealing gaps in product reach and shelf space.
- Increasing SKU availability presents a clear opportunity to improve visibility, consumer choice, and overall sales

Which is the highest selling product of Pepsi in the outlet?

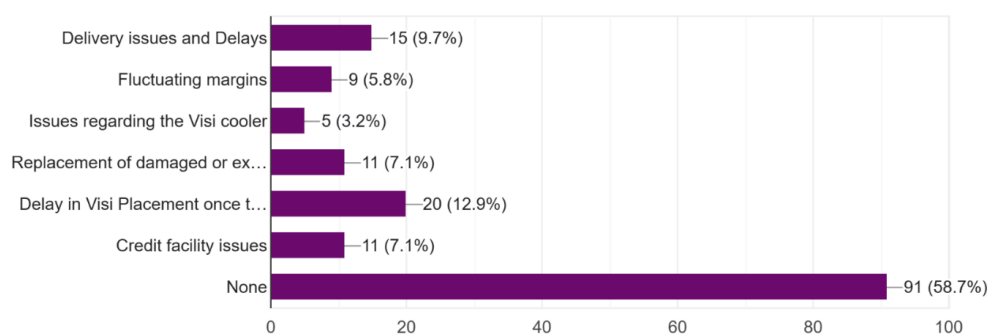
155 responses



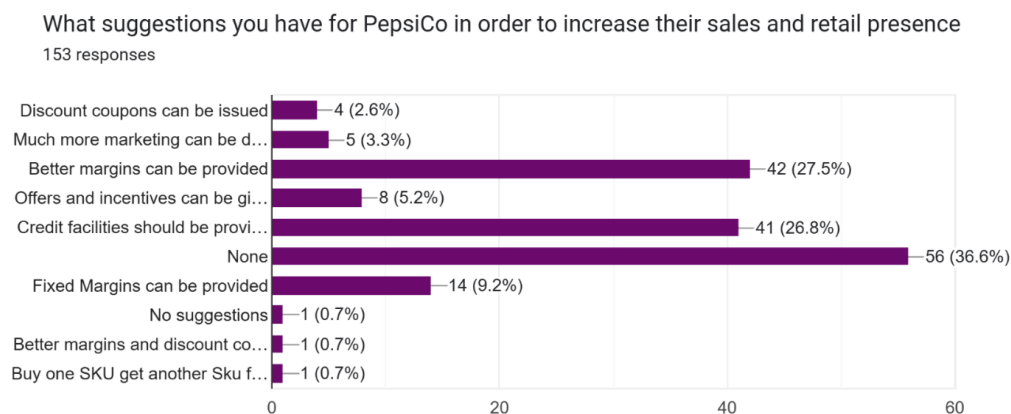
- **Sting** is the highest-selling product across most outlets due to its affordability, strong demand, and youth appeal.
- **Mountain Dew** and **Slice** also perform well—Mountain Dew in youth-heavy areas and Slice during peak summer for fruit-based preferences.
- Traditional colas like **Pepsi** and **Mirinda** show moderate to low sales, indicating shifting consumer preferences.
- Retail strategy should focus on boosting visibility and supply of top performers (Sting, Mountain Dew) while improving promotion for lower-selling SKUs.

Any problems faced by the retailer regarding PepsiCo ?

155 responses



- Retailers' biggest issue is *irregular supply and delayed deliveries*, leading to stockouts—especially for fast-moving SKUs like Sting and Mountain Dew.
- *Lack of promotional support* (posters, branding materials) weakens visibility compared to competitors like Coca-Cola.
- Retailers face *pricing and margin fluctuations*, making stock planning difficult.
- *Poor communication* from PSRs, including infrequent visits and unaddressed feedback, was commonly reported.
- Retailers want *more SKU variety*, indicating gaps in demand mapping and distribution.
- Overall, PepsiCo must improve supply chain consistency, retailer engagement, promotional support, and communication.



- Retailers' top suggestion is *consistent and timely supply*, especially for fast-moving SKUs like Sting, Slice, and Mountain Dew.
- They want *stronger promotional support* banners, stickers, danglers, standees, and seasonal schemes to boost visibility and sales.
- Retailers request *better engagement from PSRs*, including regular visits, clear communication, and faster follow-ups.
- Many outlets want *more SKUs* to meet customer demand and avoid missed sales opportunities.
- *Visi Coolers and upgraded display units* were highlighted as essential for better visibility and impulse sales.
- Retailers stressed the need for *competitive pricing and improved margins* to prefer PepsiCo over rival brands.

Area of Concerns:

A major challenge highlighted by retailers is the *inefficiency of the delivery system*. Delivery Agents often deliver late, bring incorrect SKUs, or fail to deliver full quantities, causing stockouts and loss of trust. Many retailers have even stopped placing orders due to repeated delivery failures. Another serious issue is *pricing and margin fluctuations*, which create uncertainty and discourage bulk buying. Retailers also expressed dissatisfaction with the *lack of credit facilities*, which competitors frequently offer, giving them a clear advantage.

The absence of a *return or exchange policy for expired products* further damages retailer confidence, as unsold stock becomes their financial burden. Additionally, *local wholesalers selling PepsiCo products at lower prices* than PSRs destabilizes the official sales channel and shifts business away from the company. The *Visi Cooler allocation process* was also found to be slow and bureaucratic, with long delays despite submitting documents multiple times. Lastly, PSRs' beat plans contain numerous *dead or inactive outlets*, wasting time and reducing productivity. Streamlining delivery operations, pricing policies, credit options, cooler allocation, and beat management is essential to rebuild retailer trust and improve sales performance.

Observations :

Key Observations

Field observations revealed that **Sting is PepsiCo's strongest-performing SKU**, showing high demand, rapid turnover, and consistent availability across all surveyed areas. Other products like **Pepsi Blue, Nimbooz, and Dukes Soda** also performed well, indicating solid potential if supported with better marketing. However, PepsiCo lags in **Visi Purity**, as many coolers contain mixed brands, unlike Coca-Cola, which maintains strict exclusivity and stronger visual impact.

A major issue identified is **low consumer awareness** of several PepsiCo products due to limited promotions, while competitors like Sprite and Thums Up benefit from strong advertising. Retailers also highlighted the need for **more branding materials** such as stickers, name boards, and signage—areas where PepsiCo's support has been inconsistent. A focused brand activation drive and improved merchandising support could significantly enhance visibility, strengthen retailer relationships, and boost sales.

Recommendations and Suggestions :

1. *Distribution Efficiency*: Retailers reported late deliveries, incorrect SKUs, and frequent order cancellations, weakening trust and causing stockouts. Strengthening delivery timelines, accountability, and monitoring is essential for consistent retail performance.
2. *Retailer Margins & Visibility*: Many retailers hesitate to push PepsiCo products due to lower or unstable margins. Offering fixed, competitive margins would improve visibility, shelf space, and retailer loyalty.
3. *Product Feedback*: Changes to popular SKUs (e.g., Slice 350ml and Mountain Dew 400ml) have hurt demand. Restoring earlier successful formats could revive sales and consumer preference.
4. *Speed App Issues*: PSRs cannot add or remove outlets in the app, reducing efficiency. Allowing controlled updates and improving app functionality would enhance field operations.
5. *Manch App & Visi Placement*: Cooler placement is slow and bureaucratic compared to competitors. Streamlining the process would improve visibility and cold availability at outlets.
6. *Wholesaler Pressure*: Wholesalers offering lower prices and credit threaten PSR sales. Location-based pricing or support schemes are needed to maintain competitiveness.
7. *Niche Product Margins*: Products like Cream-Bell and Dukes Water offer lower margins than competitors, discouraging stocking. Revising pricing and margins is necessary for better penetration in price-sensitive markets.

Limitations of the Study:

- The study covers only retailers in Mumbai's western suburbs, limiting its applicability to other regions.
- Convenience sampling may have introduced bias, as responses came from easily accessible or cooperative retailers.
- Self-reported data may contain recall errors, exaggeration, or subjective perceptions.
- The short data-collection period does not capture seasonal fluctuations or promotional variations.
- Competitor influence was noted but not deeply analyzed, limiting comparative insights.

Conclusion

This internship project provided strategic insights into PepsiCo's retail performance in Mumbai through field visits, retailer interactions, and survey-based feedback. The study highlighted the strong market success of SKUs like Sting, Pepsi Blue, Dukes Soda, and Nimbooz, all of which show high demand and strong potential. However, several systemic issues—delayed deliveries, inconsistent margins, weak promotional support, slow Visi Cooler placement, and lack of credit facilities—are limiting PepsiCo's ability to fully capitalize on this demand.

Retailers reported frequent delivery failures, price fluctuations, and the absence of expired-stock return policies, all of which reduce trust and enthusiasm. Competitors like Coca-Cola and Campa Cola are gaining ground due to better visibility, stronger distribution, and faster Visi deployment. Operational inefficiencies in tools like the Speed App and Manch App further hinder PSR productivity and retail execution.

A clear visibility gap also exists, with PepsiCo products lacking consistent branding support at stores. As competition intensifies, PepsiCo must address these challenges by improving distribution discipline, stabilizing pricing and margins, enabling product returns, streamlining cooler placement, and enhancing in-store branding.

Overall, the research shows that PepsiCo has strong products but is underperforming due to operational gaps. Focusing on retailer trust, supply chain efficiency, and promotional visibility can help the company regain momentum and build a more reliable, competitive, and retailer-friendly ecosystem in Mumbai.

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