

Article

Bacterial Contamination Levels and Brand Perception of Sachet Water: A Case Study in Some Nigerian Urban Neighborhoods

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Abstract: Sachet water (SW) is a major source of drinking in most Nigerian homes, thus making it a possible conveyance medium for health risks due to contamination if persist rather than for replenishment of the body. This study collected SW from three busy neighborhoods in South-West Nigeria and investigated for the presence of indicator bacteria (*Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), Total Coliform (TC), Total Heterophilic Bacteria (THB), Staphylococcus (Staph)) and some physio-chemical parameters (total dissolved solids (TDS), pH, electrical conductivity (EC), and salinity). Multi-variable and exploratory statistical methods were applied to the results to determine correlations between bacterial contamination levels and perceived brand reputation. Bacteriological tests with raw SW samples appeared too numerous to count (TNC) and thus required serial dilutions. After seven-fold serial dilutions, results obtained revealed that SW brands with good reputations had no TC and *E. coli* and was statistically significant with groupings of other SW brands ($\chi^2 = 12.28$; $p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 37.96$; $p < 0.05$). Additionally, SW brands with poor reputations had mean values of TC (19.7×10^8 cfu/mL; 14×10^8 cfu/mL 1.15×10^8 cfu/mL) and *E. coli* (18.2×10^8 cfu/mL; 38.7×10^8 cfu/mL, 32.4×10^8 cfu/mL) exceeding the threshold value of zero set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Only one sample from a poor reputation brand tested positive for Staphylococcus and was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.2191$; $p = 0.074$). Principal Component Analysis (PCA)/Factor Analysis (FA) revealed that most of the SW had fecal contamination was the major source. Therefore, this study suggests that periodic cleaning of distribution lines, location-specific treatment, and other quality control (QC) measures should be enforced to reduce water security risk for SW consumption in the region.

Keywords: sachet water; water quality; bacteriological quality; public health; drinking water

1. Introduction

The quality of drinking water plays a significant role in the quality of health of a populace. Therefore, water that is meant for consumption should undergo various treatment stages (from source to consumer) to qualify as safe for humans and animals.

With an increase in anthropogenic activities around the globe, many source-water bodies have been exposed to one level of contaminant or another [1]. These contaminants could be naturally occurring compounds discovered during exploratory activities for diverse applications in our environment and introduced to source-water bodies via runoff or groundwater infiltration [2]. In other cases, groundwater contamination may occur from underground fabricated structures or naturally occurring elements and gases in the earth's core [3]. Regardless of the primary water source, it is likely that there is one form of contamination or another that makes treatment a necessity to make water fit for human consumption [4–6].

In West African countries like Nigeria and Ghana, water is packaged in sachets as a low-cost option compared to bottled water [7,8]. Sachet water (SW) also serves as a source of drinking water for on-the-go commuters and other consumers. It is widely used in households with no access to clean drinking water sources. Producers of packaged water obtain water from surface water bodies and groundwater wells [9,10], hence it is important to investigate the quality of water before packaging and after sales to retailers or direct consumers to mitigate health risks posed by the consumption of untreated or poorly treated water. Packaged water is generally perceived to be treated water that is safe for drinking, however, studies have shown that public perception and water quality are not always directly related [7,11–13]. In a 2017 study conducted to determine and compare the quality of packaged water in different regions, it was discovered that 65 percent of the representative samples tested were contaminated. This result applied to both forms of packaged drinking water available—sachets and bottles [7]. Other studies have attempted to determine contamination levels of packaged drinking water in different parts of Nigeria and Ghana and have found the presence of heavy metals, and microbial contamination prevalent [10,14–16].

To reduce the exposure of humans to water-borne illnesses, it is essential to monitor the source quality of drinking water. In the case of civilizations with decentralized municipal water supply, regular monitoring of water bodies would be beneficial to preventing outbreaks and health hazards [17–19]. The detection of pathogens and contaminants in source water is not sufficient to prevent outbreaks, hence proper treatment must be ensured. In many regions where SW is consumed, there is a lack of regulatory enforcement of drinking water quality. Hence, private companies producing SW are in control of deciding the source of water used in production processes and the extent of water treatment before packaging [9]. In many cases, pretreatment tests are not conducted to determine the nature of pollutants in the water. Often, only chlorination is applied before water is packaged and as such, many contaminants go untreated, and very low levels of residual chlorine remain in the packaged water [20]. Another challenge with the quality of SW is storage and method of sale. Once the SW has been packaged in the factory, it is often transported in open trucks that allow exposure to sunlight, some vendors store the bags of water in outdoor cages that allow sunlight exposure while others hawk the SW in bowls containing ice and allowing sunlight exposure [21]. It is a known fact that residual chlorine in water protects public health by limiting the regrowth of microbes, however when water is exposed to sunlight, chlorine levels are likely to deplete resulting in poor water quality. Sunlight exposure to SW has also been linked to increased contaminant concentrations and turbidity at post-packaging stage [21,22].

These studies presented above show that the presence of bacterial contaminants in SW can exist due to poor quality source water, inadequate treatment processes, or improper handling after packaging. Considering the above, this study aims to investigate the physiochemical and microbial quality of SW sold in three busy neighborhoods in Ota, Ogun State, and to determine if the public perception of brand quality matches the results obtained from laboratory tests. The study also includes statistical and communality tests to predict the possible sources of bacteriological contamination. This information will add to the body of knowledge in Nigeria regarding sachet water production and consumption and

will also inform and/or reiterate to the various agencies the seeming plights surrounding SW consumption in Nigeria.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area and Sampling Procedure

The sampling of SW took place in the Ado-Odo community (6.6117° N, 3.0576° E) of Ota in Ogun State, Nigeria. As of the 2006 population census, the community had about 526,565 residents living in the region. While we expect this number to have increased beyond this due to heavy rural-urban migration, this value represents an estimate as of the time of sampling. It consists of both rural and urban communities and has a large concentration of industries. The presence of industries in the area poses a challenge to water quality due to illicit effluent dumping in surface water bodies and near groundwater recharge zones [23].

The study was centered on the bacteriological quality of SW sold and consumed in the community. SW samples were collected between November and December 2017. The sampling took place in Ado-Odo, Ota in Ogun State because the region receives about three million people yearly concentrating around Canaan-land for numerous Christian activities. During this period, it is envisaged that there will be an increased need for SW. Therefore, SW producers may decide to compromise on water treatment quality to meet up the demand. Canaan-land and its environs constitute low to medium-income households, however, irrespective of the household income category, almost everyone depends on SW to meet drinking water demands. SW-producing companies source water from boreholes due to the belief that groundwater is generally cleaner than surface water, yet studies show that water from boreholes may be of questionable quality [5]. Previous studies investigating groundwater quality in the region showed that the water posed no major health risk to consumers based on physio-chemical characteristics. However, bacteriological tests were not performed thus resulting in a partial view of the quality of groundwater as source water for SW producers in the region [24]. Major rivers in the region have been sampled and have shown elevated levels of impairment by pathogens and heavy metals [23,25–27].

In this study, eighty (80) SW of different brands were purchased around Canaan land, the meeting place for most Christians during the November–December period. The areas from which these brands were purchased were Iyana Iyesi, Elegushi, and Igbogbo area (Figure 1). During the sampling periods, these SW samples were purchased from either a store or a kiosk. According to [15], eliminating samples from hawkers i.e., those who move from one point to another, was required to eliminate weather variability such as sunlight, which can impact the water quality. In the study area, we observed two distinct sets of SW producers. The first conforms to producers who have large orders and thus produce more SW while the second set of producers have fewer orders or are less preferred by SW consumers. This *a priori* knowledge aided our sampling design. With this information, we ensured that we sampled a mixture of SW not exceeding 1 week old from both categories of SW producers. We also ensured that during the sampling period, SW produced on the day of sampling were also purchased. Similarly, we categorized SW based on the preference of consumers, storage duration, and packing quality to gain more insight into how significantly these categories can affect consumers. This further informed the study of two similar SW groupings (good or poor SW brands). Furthermore, in order to gather information about consumers' brand perceptions, we created an informal questionnaire that was used during a focus group discussion, one-on-one discussions, and retailer interviews as a guide while sampling was taking place in the study area. This allowed us to gain insight into how consumers perceive different brands and what influences their opinions when they purchase SW. In addition, we consulted with retailers to gather data on consumer behavior, including which brands are most frequently purchased and any patterns of brand selectivity.

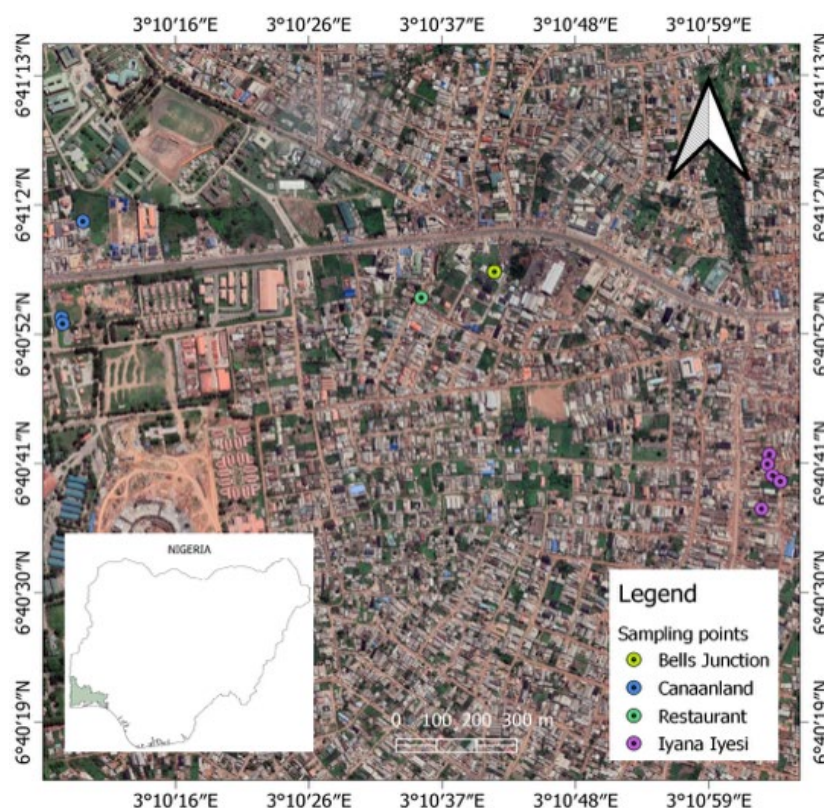


Figure 1. Clustered location of stores for Sachet Water purchase.

Furthermore, SW collected were immediately kept in an iced cooler and transported to the laboratory for some physio-chemical and bacteriological testing. We ensured that all tests were conducted within the first 24 h of purchase and samples were kept in ice at a constant temperature of 4 °C before bacteriological testing.

2.2. Physico-Chemical Analysis

The physio-chemical parameters measured include pH, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), Salinity, and Electrical Conductivity (EC). It is worth mentioning that all physico-chemical tests were carried out using Hanna Edge Multi-parameter Dissolved Oxygen Meter (HI2040) and was frequently calibrated based on the manufacturers' description using appropriate calibration solutions. The results obtained was useful in determining the suitability of the samples collected for drinking and other forms of consumption per WHO guidelines for drinking.

2.3. Bacteriological Analysis

Bacteriological testing was conducted for the detection of *E. coli*, Total Heterotrophic bacteria, Total Coliform, and *Staphylococcus Aureus*. The Multiple Tube Fermentation Test was used to evaluate the number of active bacteria specie present in all samples collected. The total coliform count in SW samples was determined using the Most Probable Number (MPN) assay. This test is also known as the presence or absence test since it focuses on detecting the presence or absence of coliform bacteria in a sample. This test is based on the premise that for every 100 mL of drinking water, there should be no coliform bacteria present. However, if one viable cell of coliform bacteria is present in the sample being tested, it will reproduce to give a population of lactose fermenting cells that release acid and gas [28,29].

Most Probable Number Assay

The MPN Assay is widely used for the estimation of viable microbes in a known quantity of samples (food or water) by creating replicates of liquid broth growth in ten-fold dilutions [30,31]. Based on statistical probabilities, the number of viable microbes in the original sample is approximated using an MPN table [32,33]. The MacConkey broth used for these tests was prepared in single and double-strength concentrations following standard procedures and samples were added according to standard methods to determine the presence of bacteria communities (Figure 2) [31]. The resulting solution was incubated at 37 °C for 24 h. The fermentation tubes were inspected for microbial growth after 24 h as well. Fermentation tubes with no indication of microbial growth were incubated for an additional 48 h [34]. Once the reaction time was completed, the number of fermentation tubes indicating microbial growth per sample was compared to the standard MPN charts and the number of microbes present was recorded.

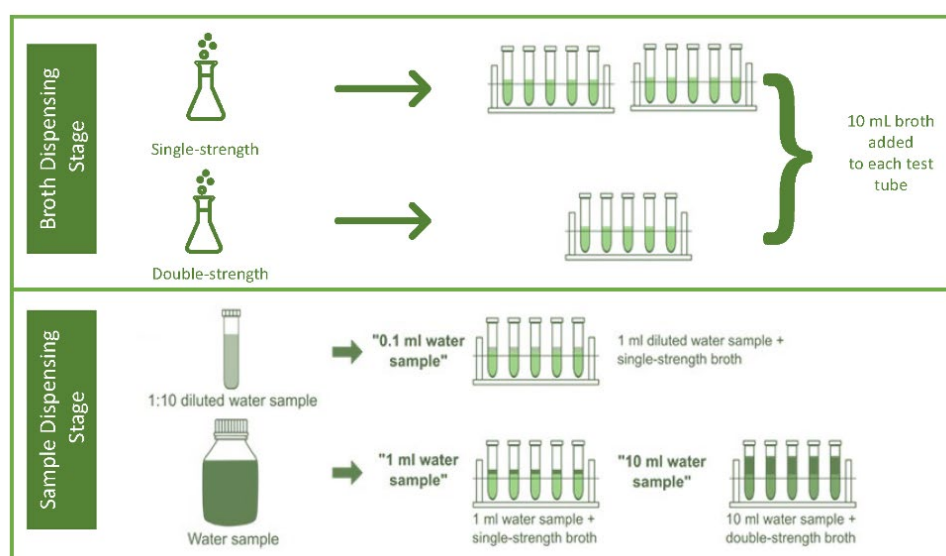


Figure 2. Most Probable Number Test Procedure.

Following the presumptive tests, the fermentation tubes that produced gas were inoculated on a variety of agar mediums. The streak-plate method was used to isolate pure cultures on eosin methylene blue agar plates, nutritional agar plates, and MacConkey agar, which were incubated at 37 °C for 24 h. For the detection of thermotolerant *E. coli*, high-temperature incubation at 44.5 ± 0.2 °C was used. The colonies that grew on each agar were then counted and recorded. Most of the results for the first set of samples yielded colonies that were too numerous to count (TNC). This prompted the use of serial dilution in the second and third tests of the samples before plating and incubation in order to obtain results for statistical analyses. After incubation was complete, the plates were physically and microscopically examined for the formation of colonies [35].

3. Results

The 80 samples tested in this study were collected from three main sampling location clusters—Iyana Iyesi, Igbogbo and Elegushi. In the process of sample collection, we observed that some consumers across different income levels purchased SW that was cheaper and packed in larger sachets despite all brands claiming to sell a uniform 50 mL of water. Thus, we can infer that to the consumers, all SW is the same by constantly reciting the parlance that “water is water” as “water has no enemy”. Despite this inference, responses from focus groups, one-on-one conversations with consumers and retailer perspective informed us that other chunk of consumers have a perception of which SW brands are likely to be of higher quality compared to others.

The results presented in this section are based on three levels of comparison. The first level highlights the samples categorized as good or poor brand based on data collected from focus groups and other consumer-retailer assessments from each location cluster (Table 1). The second level highlights the samples originally categorized by consumers as being good brand whose bacteriological results match public perception. All other samples that do not meet bacteriological test standards are categorized as poor brands in level 2 as well (Table 2). The third level of comparison highlights SW samples that are of good quality based on bacteriological tests and regardless of consumer brand perception (Table 3).

Table 1. Sachet Water Characteristics based on the neighborhood of purchase.

Variables	Iyana Iyesi n = 23	Elegushi n = 44	Igbogbo n = 13	χ^2	p Value
Nominal measures, count (%) *					
Good brand reputation	23 (100)	41 (93.18)	7 (53.85)	19.6435	<0.001
Collected before 1 day old	6 (26.09)	21 (47.73)	6 (46.15)	3.0728	0.215
Poor sachet wrapper	11 (47.83)	14 (31.82)	10 (76.92)	8.5139	0.0014
<i>E. coli</i> > 0	9 (39.13)	30 (68.18)	13 (100)	16.1175	<0.001
THB > 500	21 (91.3)	42 (95.45)	13 (100)	1.3647	0.505
TC > 0	13 (56.52)	15 (34.09)	1 (7.69)	8.7665	0.012
Staph > 0	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (7.69)	5.2191	0.074
Continuous measure, mean (S.E) *					
Salinity	0.1 (0.006)	0.13 (0.006)	0.12 (0.010)		0.2600
EC	48 (5.35)	51 (3.92)	51 (2.97)		0.8978
TDS	25 (1.38)	33 (8.73)	24 (2.66)		0.7030
pH	5.57 (0.16)	6.05 (0.09)	5.79 (0.08)		0.0156
Staph (CFU/mL) $\times 10^8$	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.46 (2.46)		0.0745
THB (CFU/mL) $\times 10^8$	46.7 (5.14)	30.4 (5.07)	21.0 (3.78)		0.0349
TC (CFU/mL) $\times 10^8$	19.7 (5.56)	14 (51.8)	1.15 (1.15)		0.0716
<i>E. coli</i> (CFU/mL) $\times 10^8$	18.2 (5.79)	38.7 (12.9)	32.4 (7.12)		0.4872

Note: * Values in brackets represent percentages for nominal and mean for continuous measures.

Table 2. Sachet water characteristics based on classification of brand reputation matching SW quality and collection period.

Characteristics	Samples Matching Brand Reputation		p-Value	Collection Period		p-Value
	Good n = 11	Poor n = 69		>1 day n = 47	≤1 day n = 33	
Nominal measures, count (%) *						
Collected after 1 day old	6 (54.54)	41 (59.42)	0.609			
THB > 500	9 (81.81)	67 (97.10)	0.465	45 (95.74)	31 (93.94)	0.715
<i>E. coli</i> > 0	0 (0)	51 (73.91)	0.016	34 (72.34)	17 (51.51)	0.056
TC > 0	0 (0)	29 (42.03)	0.096	12 (25.53)	17 (51.51)	0.0017
Staph > 0	0 (0)	1 (1.45)	0.720	0 (0)	1 (3.03)	0.230

Note: * Values in brackets represent percentages.

Table 3. Comparison between good and poor-quality sachet water based on bacteriological test results.

Characteristics	Hebron and Medix n = 17	Other Brands n = 63	χ^2	p-Value
Nominal measures, count (%)				
Collected after 1 day old	8 (47.06)	39 (61.90)	1.218	0.270
THB > 500	13 (76.47)	63 (100)	15.604	0.000
TC > 0	0 (0)	29 (46.03)	12.275	0.000

Table 3. Cont.

Characteristics	Hebron and Medicx	Other Brands	χ^2	<i>p</i> -Value
	n = 17	n = 63		
<i>E. coli</i> > 0	0 (0)	51 (80.95)	37.964	0.000
Staph > 0	0 (0)	1 (1.59)	0.2733	0/601

3.1. Contamination Dominance and Brand Reputation

From the three (3) sampling cluster locations, 23 (100%) SW samples from Iyana Iyesi, 41 SW samples (53.85%) from Elegushi, and 7 SW (53.85%) from Igbogbo were classified as the brand of perceived good reputation based on direct responses from field studies. Of these SW of good reputation, 6 SW were purchased from Iyana Iyesi (26.09%), 21 SW (47.73%) from Elegushi, and 6 (46.15%) from Igbogbo were purchased on the day of production with a statistically significant difference between sets of SW purchased ($p < 0.05$). Cross tabulation was used to determine the relationship between variables and their corresponding chi-square and *p*-values were used to establish statistical significance between sets. The multi-variable comparison suggests that perceived brands of SW of poor reputation were sold in Iyana Iyesi and Elegushi combined. From which, fifty-two SW samples had *E. coli*. Specifically, 9 SW from Iyana Iyesi (39.13%), 30 SW (68.18%) from Elegushi, and all 13 (100%) samples from Igbogbo with a strong statistical difference ($p = 0.001$). These SW samples had mean count values of 18.2×10^8 cfu/mL, 38.7×10^8 cfu/mL and 32.4×10^8 cfu/mL respectively for these locations with no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$). These values recorded exceeded the world health organization's (WHO) limits of *E. coli* of zero tolerance. For THB, the values measured from SW samples from these three locations were significantly higher than 500 cfu/mL. Specifically, 21 SW (91.38) from Iyana Iyesi, 42 SW (95.45%) from Elegushi, and all 13 (100%) samples from Igbogbo with no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 1.365$, $p = 0.505$). In addition, more information on mean *E. coli*, TC, THB, and physicochemical values were estimated and recorded in Table 1.

The actual mean values recorded revealed that THB values from these locations exceeded the threshold for THB with values at 46.7×10^8 cfu/mL, 30.4×10^8 cfu/mL and 21.0×10^8 cfu/mL for each location respectively and were statistically different ($p = 0.034$). TC on the other hand was not different in terms of count from the three locations as SW samples were prevalent with TC contamination. To mention, 13 SW (56.52%) from Iyana Iyesi, 15 SW (34.09%) from Elegushi, and 1 SW (7.69%) from Igbogbo ($\chi^2 = 8.7665$, $p = 0.012$) were recorded to have TC in SW in the three locations. Staphylococcus was present in only one sample and was purchased from Igbogbo which may have been due to chance ($\chi^2 = 5.219$, $p > 0.05$). In addition, physio-chemical properties measured for all SW samples from the three locations revealed no statistical difference between them except for pH. Electrical conductivity (EC) which can be a measure of the ionic content in water showed no statistical difference between SW obtained at different locations ($p = 0.8978$) with mean values of 48 μ S/cm, 51 μ S/cm, and 51 μ S/cm for Iyana Iyesi, Elegushi, and Igbogbo respectively. The pH values measured from SW suggest that they are acidic with mean values of 5.57, 6.05, and 5.79 for Iyana Iyesi, Elegushi, and Igbogbo respectively while TDS values were also at 25 mg/L, 33 mg/L, and 24 mg/L with no significant difference ($p = 0.7030$) (Table 1).

For the second level of comparison, the 80 SW samples tested in this study were classified into brands of good and poor reputation after being tested in the laboratory. Of the 80 samples, sixty-nine (69) were placed in the category of SW brand with poor reputation while eleven (11) samples were placed under good reputation SW brand. The quantity of SW classified as good was based on samples whose quality matched public perception. All other samples with poor bacteriological results, were categorized as poor brands (Table 2). Additionally, the SW samples collected were classified based on the time of purchase after production and was recorded in Table 2. 9 samples (81.81%) of SW containing THB were of good reputation and 67 samples (97.10%) were brands of the poor reputation and the values

of THB were above the threshold ($\chi^2 = 0.5337$; $p = 0.465$). None of the perceived good brands of SW contained *E. coli* while 51(73.91%) of the perceived poor brands had *E. coli* present and were statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 5.766$; $p = 0.016$). In addition, no SW from the good reputation brand category had TC present while 29 SW samples of poor reputation brands recorded TC values with statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 2.773$; $p = 0.096$). Table 1 highlights the values of THB, *E. coli*, TC, and Staph based on the above-mentioned classifications.

Only one brand from a poor reputation SW brand reported staphylococcus, which overall was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.1284$; $p = 0.720$). Surprisingly, some samples collected on the day of production reported the presence of THB, TC, and *E. coli*. As seen in Table 2, THB values were present from 31 (93.94%) SW produced on the same day while 45 (95.74%) were seen from SW samples stored over time with no significant statistical difference between them ($\chi^2 = 0.1330$; $p = 0.713$). This simply suggests that storing them over time was not a reason for the presence of THB, rather these bacteria were inherent in the distribution system of water supply. Similarly, 17 (51.51%) SW had both TC and *E. coli* and were produced on the same day while more samples 34 (72.34%) SW stored over time had a significantly high value of ($\chi^2 = 5.664$; $p = 0.77$) for TC.

During the bacteriological investigation of the SW samples, it was observed that two SW brands had no *E. coli* and Total coliform (TC) present (Table 3). These results informed the classification of samples in the third level of comparison. To mention, one of the brands was already classified as a brand with a good reputation while the other was a brand perceived to have a poor reputation by the consumers living within the vicinity where the SW sample was sold. Therefore, for this study, we stratified these SW into two groups which comprised of both SW brands (Hebron and Medix) in one group and other brands as a second group to determine whether a significant difference exist in their contamination levels. The findings of his process have been captured in Table 3. The results showed the SW samples yield on TC ($\chi^2 = 12.28$; $p < 0.05$), *E. coli* ($\chi^2 = 37.96$; $p < 0.05$), and Staph ($\chi^2 = 0.273$; $p > 0.05$) over time with these values showing statistical significance.

3.2. Contamination Dominance and Explanatory Analysis of Bacteriological and Physio-Chemical Stressors

In this study, a correlation was carried out on 80 SW samples to determine the relationship between bacteriological and physio-chemical variables called stressors. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used in place of Pearson's correlation coefficient based on the normality test conducted using Shapiro-wilk's test for normality. The test revealed a non-normal distribution of stressors measured in SW samples ($p < 0.05$). Table 4 shows the relationship and the statistical significance of the 2-tailed test conducted. Statistical significance but negative correlations were observed between conductivity with [TC ($r = -0.247$; $p < 0.01$); *E. coli* ($r = -0.602$; $p < 0.01$); THB ($r = -0.453$; $p < 0.01$)], suggesting that bacteria in water would do well and better at lower conductivity levels and that fecal matter present is not the source for high conductivity recorded from SW samples but occurring mutually exclusively mainly due to presence of salts and metalloids. For TDS, a strong statistical positive correlation was observed between TDS with [EC ($r = 0.992$; $p < 0.01$); Salinity ($r = 0.676$; $p < 0.01$)] while strong negative statistical significance was observed with all bacteriological stressors ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Correlation Matrix between measured parameters.

		Correlation Matrix						
		Conductivity	TDS	pH	Salinity	TC	<i>E. coli</i>	THB
Correlation	Conductivity	1.000	0.992 **	0.044	0.676 **	−0.247 **	−0.602 **	−0.453 **
	TDS	0.992 **	1.000	0.054	0.676 **	−0.231 *	−0.582 **	−0.430 **
	pH	0.044	0.054	1.000	0.502 **	−0.024	−0.081	−0.190
	salinity	0.676 **	0.676 **	0.502 **	1.000	−0.263 *	−0.419 **	−0.454 **

Table 4. Cont.

Correlation Matrix							
	Conductivity	TDS	pH	Salinity	TC	<i>E. coli</i>	THB
TC	−0.247 *	−0.231 *	−0.024	−0.263 *	1.000	0.571 **	0.467 **
<i>E. coli</i>	−0.602 **	−0.582 **	−0.081	−0.419 **	0.571 **	1.000	0.615 **
THB	−0.453 **	−0.430 **	−0.190	−0.454 **	0.467 **	0.615 **	1.000

Note: * p -value < 0.05; ** p -value < 0.01.

With the latter already described with the same perception as EC i.e., TDS to EC ($r = 0.992$; $p < 0.01$), the former suggests that Salinity to TDS relationship emanates from the same source. Therefore, this is likely to be from either the extraction process of water used for making SW containing rock salts or salt compounds added to reduce pH. Interestingly, the strong statistical correlation between pH and salinity ($r = 0.5025$; $p < 0.01$) could suggest that increased salinity was due to buffering pH as both increased directly. Additionally, an attempt was made to identify major pollution in the SW samples by conducting an exploratory statistical method using PCA/FA and communalities. PCA/FA is a dimension reduction that can be useful in whittling down variables to important factors depending on the subject at hand. It whittles this by grouping variables into factors or component loadings. The output of these component loading in a factor shows the relationship of the variables on each component. On the other hand, communalities show how well these variables explain the variability in a component and it is very useful as a performance evaluator of measured components extracted during PCA/FA procedures. However, both techniques are sensitive to the size of the dataset and produce spurious output when the variables used do not follow a normal curve distribution.

Before conducting the PCA/FA analysis, the variables were first tested for sampling adequacy using the KMO and Bartlett test. These tests were conducted for two main reasons. First, the KMO test revealed whether the data set to be used for PCA/FA statistical operations was suitable. Literature has suggested that KMO values greater than 0.5 are usually suitable but most will agree that higher values of KMO i.e., >0.5 are even better. Second, Bartlett's test hypothesizes that the data set to be extracted are typically uncorrelated which can be determined by the p -value. For our study as seen in Table 5, KMO was 0.653 which suggests that our dataset is suitable for extraction while Bartlett's test also showed that the dataset is uncorrelated ($p < 0.05$). Thereafter, normalization or transformation was carried out using the CLR method discussed elsewhere. The transformed dataset was then subjected to exploratory analysis and reported in Table 6.

Table 5. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of sampled SW.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.653
Approx. Chi-Square		214.392
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	21
	Sig.	0.000

Table 6. PCA and communality results of sampled SW.

Rotated Component Matrix			
	Component		ComVal
	1	2	
Conductivity	0.802	−0.351	0.767
TDS	0.620	−0.073	0.389
Ph	0.662	0.064	0.442

Table 6. Cont.

	Rotated Component Matrix		ComVal
	Component 1	Component 2	
salinity	0.902	−0.251	0.876
TC	−0.088	0.828	0.693
<i>E. coli</i>	−0.021	0.795	0.633
THB	−0.248	0.696	0.546

The result from the PCA/FA was determined using two main rules (Table 5). The first rule is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin rule which suggests that meaningful components are usually extracted with Eigenvalue greater than 1 (Table 6). Next was the Elbow or Point of Inflection shown on a Scree plot (Figure 3). From both rules, components were factored as 2. The major advantage of FA is that it helps in the grouping, which can be used in this context for source allocation. For example, in this study, component 1 had strong loadings on Salinity and Conductivity. While component 2 is correlated by *E. coli* and Total Coliform suggesting the presence of fecal contamination. This could only be possible as the distribution system accumulates bacterial films and sediments that do so well in retaining organisms in the water. Therefore, showing multiple lines of evidence that infrequent cleaning and lack of advanced treatment mechanisms are so lacking in the SW industry and require both the attention of consumers and relevant government agencies. The absence of these would only increase the level of water insecurity as new and old packaged water companies would show increased lackadaisical behavior towards producing packaged drinking water of better quality.

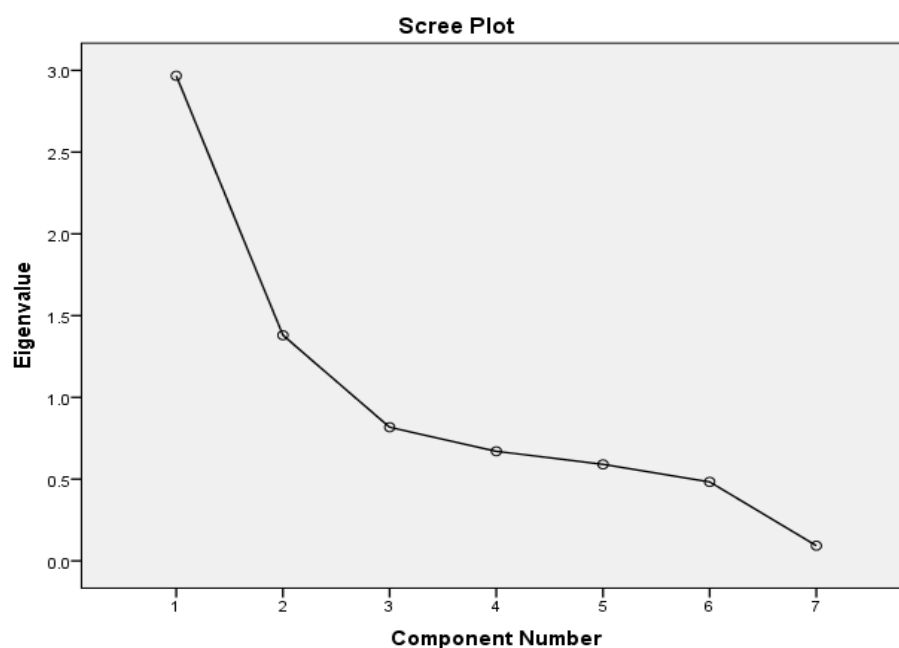


Figure 3. Scree plot showing the point of inflection for the PCA/FA analysis.

Communality analysis shown in Table 5 revealed that ionic contamination was well explained when compared to bacteriological contamination in the SW studied. Specifically, it revealed that 87.6% of salinity and 76.7% of conductivity were explained by factor analysis while 69.3% and 63.3% explained the variability of TC and *E. coli* in its Factor Component 2. An indication that shows or depicts a satisfactory performance suggests that lesser grouping was more effective than extended groupings.

4. Discussion

From this study, we investigated the presence of bacteriological contamination. Seemingly, the presence of fecal contamination was detected in 51 ($\geq 81\%$) of SW investigated in the region. The contamination levels recorded were in amounts that require urgent attention. This is concerning because, before seven-fold serial dilution, the results initially recorded from the MPN test of SW samples revealed TNC observations of bacteriological contamination. This suggests that none of the SW is fit for consumption and that is very concerning. In the past, a study [36] investigated the presence of bacteria in 92 SW in Lagos, Nigeria. The findings from that study showed elevated *E. coli* values which were significantly higher than the threshold set by WHO. The values in this study revealed a much higher presence of bacterial contamination than those reported in earlier studies. Amongst all samples tested, only one sample was positive for the presence of staph. Although this study reports the presence of staph in the SW sample as statistically insignificant, it calls for a more proactive public health check to avoid any occurrences.

In the PCA/FA analysis, component 1 had strong loadings on Salinity and Conductivity. While component 2 is correlated by *E. coli* and Total Coliform suggesting the presence of fecal contamination. This could only be possible as the distribution system accumulates bacterial films and sediments that do so well in retaining organisms in the water. Therefore, showing multiple lines of evidence that infrequent cleaning and lack of advanced treatment mechanisms are so lacking in the SW industry and require both the attention of consumers and relevant government agencies to be properly addressed. The absence of these would only increase the level of water insecurity as new and old packaged water companies would show increased lackadaisical behavior towards producing packaged drinking water of better quality.

Staph infections have been reported to cause extremely serious or fatal infections in humans including bacteremia, sepsis (when bacteria spread to the bloodstream), pneumonia, endocarditis (infection of the heart valves), and osteomyelitis (bone infection) [37]. Another study [38] also investigated SW consumed by university students in Kumasi Ghana and found 50% of SW investigated contained TC & EC of similar contamination levels as this current study. However, their finding did not agree with findings from [14] that found no *E. coli* presence in SW samples investigated in Ghana. These studies suggest that there is need for a location-based continuous monitoring scheme to create more public awareness. Two SW brands in this study showed no presence of TC & EC. The first brand (Hebron) is a brand every SW consumer around the studied area would prefer to purchase but they see it beyond their reach as SW produced by this brand are bought off quickly before it spreads to the neighborhood, thus making it expensive to purchase compared to other brands in the region. The other brand is not well known and does not feature attractive quality packaging. Despite the good performance of the two SW brands after seven-fold serial dilution, it is opined that best management practices as stipulated by National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) should be unrelentingly followed. NAFDAC reported that persistent presence of pathogenic bacteria in SW is due to the use of untreated raw water as well as SW companies non-compliance for treatment of raw water. NAFDAC (2018) recommends that the treatment process in all SW production factories should follow the stated order (Figure 4). Previous studies have shown that microfiltration has the capacity to remove all bacteria from the water being treated. Hence, it can be deduced from the results obtained that SW manufacturers do not adhere to the recommended treatment guidelines prescribed by NAFDAC. Another reason for bacteria presence in packaged SW could be linked to the fouling of membranes in facilities where microfiltration systems are used [39–42]. Hence, a need for proper cleaning of the microfiltration membranes is also essential for maintaining water quality.

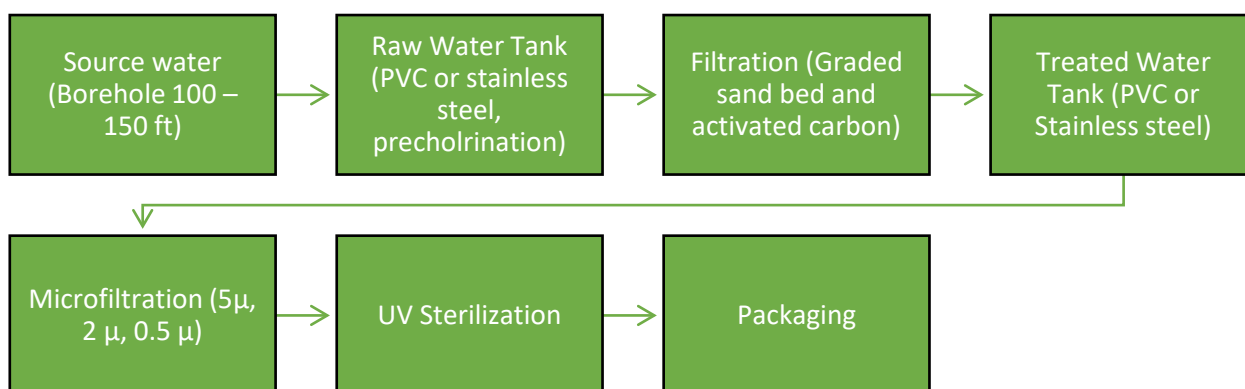


Figure 4. NAFDAC recommendations for sachet water production processes.

Poor hygiene practices in SW production facilities can be linked to the presence of staph in packaged water. Most SW factories visited during this study were in poor environmental conditions with waste polyethylene bags and papers littered all over. It is believed that this may lead to heightened microbial contamination due to the proximity of SW production facilities to waste disposal facilities, including septic tanks and small to medium dumpsters [43]. A deformation in the physical component of these facilities can lead to the escape of substances of public health concern into SW processes. [44,45] reported that *E. coli* and other microbes from fecal contamination can enter raw water sources when open defecation is practiced close to water bodies or when a leak exists in a septic tank. These contaminants can be transferred to packaged water in the case where proper treatment is not ensured, thus causing a public health crisis. This study, therefore, has revealed that there is a higher possibility of a range of non-treatment to inadequate treatment of water used for SW purposes even though many of the SW companies claim to involve in reverse osmosis, microfiltration process, and chlorination. This study embarked on gives new insight to the contamination level years after a similar investigation was conducted in a different region of West Africa. Our findings corroborate with the conditions of [46] that in high demand there is a possibility of the high occurrence of contamination levels because of limited or no maintenance of water supply distribution lines, as well as a non-compliance of SW manufacturers to good sanitation and hygiene measures. It is a great concern to note the high number of fecal indicators consistently found in SW across the country. Even though this is consistent with our study, being that it was conducted in a busy period where Christians from over the world gather en masse, the authors of this study see that the results might be the same irrespective of seasonality [11]. The reason for this conclusion was due to the environmental conditions of the SW factories during our study.

5. Conclusions

The bacteriological quality of 80 SW samples collected from three neighborhoods in Ota, Nigeria was investigated. The results obtained were used to conduct statistical analysis to determine the level of significance of the contamination. Additionally, bacterial dominance was correlated with a brand reputation to give an informed re-education of public perception as to what brands they should be consuming for the safety of their health. Initial bacteriological tests revealed that all SW are not fit for consumption. All the results obtained for 69 samples fall below the WHO limits for the bacteriological quality of drinking water. Although THB has no associated health risk, the WHO standard requires a maximum of 500 CFU/ML in water. Additionally, a high concentration of THB is an indication of favorable conditions for the growth of more dangerous microbes such as *E. coli*, *Legionella*, and *S. Typhi* and these can cause serious harm to human health and in some cases, death. The results obtained in this study show THB counts over the recommended WHO limit which is a cause for concern.

Fecal contamination in SW has become a norm in SW at an alarming rate such that entrusting the monitoring of the SW production process to NAFDAC, which appears to have done less in enforcing regulations in this regard will be a grave mistake for the public. Frequent periodic monitoring programs and collaborations between SW manufacturers and researchers are encouraged to find a lasting solution to this crisis. It is also important to note that the problem of bacterial dominance in packaged water is location specific, and as such requires location-specific water treatment as opposed to a general treatment approach. Testing of source water quality should be mandated for all SW manufacturers and specific measures should be undertaken to remove the contaminants found in the source water. It is also encouraged that the public pays more attention to the SW they consume as it can impair their health negatively. Finally, properly cleaning water treatment facilities and distribution systems to remove sediments and clogged bacterial films can to a large extent help reduce the re-occurrence of bacteria into packaged SW after treatment. This study compared public perception of the quality of SW across various brands with the actual quality of SW based on bacteriological tests. Although previous studies have shown that storage and handling conditions have a significant impact on the quality of SW, this study did not consider these factors in our analysis. Despite the similarities in the quality of SW across many regions, literature suggests that conducting location-specific studies is crucial due to differences in source water quality, treatment methods, and handling techniques of SW. Thus, we recommend conducting further studies to investigate the impact of storage and handling conditions on SW in this study region. Additionally, as microplastics are a growing concern in products stored in polyethylene containers, we recommend exploring the possibility of microplastics in SW due to degradation during transportation and storage, as this poses a potential threat to human health. Finally, despite mentioning the lack of compliance of most if not all SW producers within the study area, this study was unable to determine whether NAFDAC policies were effective, lacked compliance or broken at worst. Future studies can conduct a panel data analysis on this subject across countries or regions where SW is ubiquitous.

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