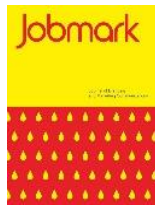


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# Consumers' Perceptual Experiences of the Prices and their Relevance to Brand Image and Brand Loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

How consumers perceive a price is believed to have certain value has become the focus of firm strategies in recent years. This study explores on how Consumers' Perceptual Experiences of the Prices and their Relevance to Brand Image and Brand Loyalty. The findings suggest that price is not the main star of the price itself. There are so many things revolving around price that have relevance with Brand Image & Brand Loyalty. This research found that customers memorize prices better when they have a good experience with the price & memorize it as a positive memory and it locks the image of a good-quality brand with good-quality price for their subjective affordability. This thesis also creates several follow-up questions as this thesis found, information received by customers affects the way they justify a price, several questions are then created such as what kind of communication is the most effective in communicating added value or what kind of information can justify added value.

## Keywords

Brand image; brand loyalty; phenomenology of perception; perceived price; price;

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## INTRODUCTION

Kago Laundry is a laundromat that was founded in 2016, until now Kago Laundry has 4 branches in the South Jakarta area (Gandaria, Seskoal, Pakubuwono Terrace & Pakubuwono Residence). Kago Laundry's vision is to become a laundromat with premium quality at an affordable price. Until now, the business process is running well, it's just that there is 1 outlet whose revenue does not meet the target: Pakubuwono Terrace outlet. Pakubuwono Terrace is a middle-up apartment, aiming for a lower income level compared to the already famous Pakubuwono Residence apartment.

When it was first opened, Kago Laundry assumed that a considerable percentage of the Pakubuwono Terrace residents were the right target, especially for kilo laundry services, considering that many of them only had limited space, also the cost of household assistants which tended to be high in the Capital area, as well as high mobility that made them less likely to have time to wash clothes. Their income level however, is a little tricky. Kilo laundry is infamous for being cheap but has concerning quality. Kago assumes a chunk of middle class society has demand for premium service, but has limited buying power to afford top tier

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service, hence comes the premium kilo service at 16,000 per kilogram. This is an unproven assumption, of whether the middle class would be willing to pay slightly more for added values.

After opening an outlet at Pakubuwo Terrace Apartment for 1 year, Kago Laundry wondered, what could be wrong with this business strategy. Given outlets in other middle-up areas such as Gandaria are fine and likely to produce. For now, residents of the Pakubuwo Terrace apartment wash more shoes and clothes at Kago Laundry, while the kilo laundry does not match the initial target and target consumers are seen using the competitor's service more.

The shoes and bags coming in are actually a signal that their income level is on the level to purchase something branded and rather premium, and Kago's brand seems to convince them to trust their expensive items. However for daily kilo laundry they seem to not be bought by the added value given. In terms of competitors, there are those located close to Kago with cheaper prices for kilo laundry and brand their services to be cheaper but offer no added value. Also, in this case, initially Kago Laundry did not think that this was the main problem, considering that the targeted market was different from the pricing side which they could not suppress anymore.

However, the question is, with the market research conducted at the beginning, it is not comparable to the current results. Meanwhile, indirect competitors, without doing extra branding, tend to always look flocked by endless customers. So the next question is: Does it turn out that the residents in the apartment still see price as a factor in making a decision to consume laundry services? Or what is actually wrong with Kago Laundry so that for kilo laundry service, residents prefer competitor's brand? What experiences make apartment residents choose to use the services of competitors or what kind of experience does Kago Laundry have to present to win the hearts of consumers?

Based on the Problem Statement above, this study aims to:

- a. Explore/ understand the meaning and perception of prices among consumers related to premium brand laundry products.
- b. Find out the implications of the consumer's perceptual experience on the premium price of laundry for brand image.
- c. Find out the implications of consumers' perceptual experience on premium laundry prices for brand loyalty.

### *Relevant Concepts*

There are some relevant concepts to the research subject. The theories will explain the whole phenomenon of perception, where humans perceive stimuli the way they do, and in this context is pricing. The study will try to analyze how target consumers perceive price, whether or not it affects their experience, and ultimately how the experience affected by price affects the image in which they perceive the brand and how it influences their loyalty. Therefore, several important theories to be discussed are phenomenology of perception, perceived price, brand experience, brand image and brand loyalty.

### *Phenomenology of Perception*

Perception of Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty (2002), is a study that discusses the essence where all problems are the same as finding the definition of essence. Both the essence of perception and consciousness. But phenomenology is also a philosophy that returns essence to being, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from scratch. This study focuses on the 'Sensation' as a Unit of Experience, 'Association' and the 'Projection of Memories', 'Attention' and 'Judgment'. The Author uses this theory to find out how consumers perceive price by the sensation they get, how they associate price with so-called premium product/service and what affects their attention and judgment

towards price itself. Aspects of perception will be explained as follows:

Sensation, as one of a unit of experience, is defined as the action of stimuli on our bodies. It's the 'final effect' of knowledge, specifically scientific knowledge, and it is the illusion that causes us to put it at the beginning and to believe that it precedes knowledge.

- a. Association and the Projection of Memory, or specifically 'association of ideas' brings back past experiences and only brings back extrinsic memories, and can't be more than one itself. Once consciousness is defined as sensation, each mode of consciousness must derive its clarity from sensation.
- b. Attention, in order to relate to consciousness, one would have to show how a perception awakens attention, then how attention develops and enriches it. Attention is neither an association of images, nor the return to itself of thought already in control of its objects and is rooted in consciousness, and it emerges from its liberty of indifference and gives itself a present object.
- c. Judgment, often introduced as what sensation lacks to make perception possible. Judgment is everywhere where pure sensation is not—that is, absolutely everywhere. The evidence of phenomena will therefore everywhere be challenged.

### *Perceived Price*

Price is unquestionably one of the most important marketplace cues (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). According to research, Price construction has 2 roles, there are Negative Role of Price & Positive Role of Price. The negative role of price consists of:

- a. Value consciousness, Price perception for some consumers is characterized by paying attention to the quality received at the price paid. Some researcher define the concept of value in the same terms as this perspective. As a result, value awareness/consciousness is conceptualized as a reflection of concern for the price paid with the quality received.

- b. Price consciousness, Price perception can be characterized by some consumers in more detail as a reflection of their price consciousness. The use of the term "price consciousness" is to determine the extent to which consumers are focused on paying only low prices.
- c. Coupon proneness, It's the form in which price is being placed by value but not in its real form. Discounted prices in the form of coupons can result in increased consumer response beyond that which could result from lower equivalent prices in the form of non-coupons. This finding implies that the increase in "coupon form"-generated sales over the increase that would result from lower non-coupon prices is due to increased price sensitivity in its negative role when offered in coupon form.
- d. Sale proneness, Increased sensitivity to price in the negative role associated with price in the form of discounts. Consumers start to evaluate the profitability of paying the value of discounter price because of the purchase price in the form of sales. This is categorized as a consumer's price perception in its negative role as a reflection of sales tendencies. Sale proneness positively influences purchase evaluation.
- e. Price mavenism. The desire to know in advance about market prices in order to transmit that information to others. Price mavenism is the degree to which an individual is a source for price information for many kinds of products and places to shop for the lowest prices.

As for the aspect of the positive role of price, there are:

- a. d. Price Recall, In a nutshell, people who view price as a positive thing (don't care about price) tend to have inaccurate price recall. Ex: the food is delicious, the price is fixed, it's around 25-50 I don't remember being persistent. Meanwhile, people who have a negative impression of prices tend to remember prices more accurately (Has a

more accurate price memory). Example: "It's crazy expensive, it costs 75,000 for just-a-bread!" or "How come the price went up yesterday, it was already expensive by 15,000, how come now it's 17,000?". People can memorize prices better when it gives a negative experience. Meanwhile when we experience a so-so or positive experience about a product/service, we tend to remember the price much less than the one that gives us a negative experience.

- b. e. Sale and Coupon Responsive Behavior, Differences in the way consumers perceive prices also result in different responses to advertised sales and coupon offers. Because sales with coupons represent an opportunity to get the product at a low price.

### *Brand Image*

Brand image plays an important role in brand development because brand image is closely related to reputation and credibility which then becomes an important basis for consumer audiences to try and use a product or service which then creates certain experiences that will determine whether consumers will be loyal to a brand, or remain a person who easily switch to another brand (Wijaya, 2013). In his research, Mischel (1974) found that there are 2 elements that can influence and shape people's perception, Personal and Environmental elements.

Personal Elements is one that is associated with consumer experience towards the stimuli crafted by brand owner, meanwhile Environment Elements are about technical attributes that exist on a product in which it can be controlled by brand owner. Personal attributes are something that is designed to represent a certain image to the consumer, whether through the outlet appearance (vibe, sound, colors, and aesthetic), packaging, and the association brands are trying to build in between those attributes. Environmental attributes are how the product in itself is technically distinct from other brands, whether by its business

process, service provided, service level agreement, etc.

These are the dimension of brand image according to Wijaya (2013):

- *Brand Identity*, physical or tangible identities related to the brand or product that makes consumers easily identify and differentiate with other brands or products
- *Brand Personality & Characters*, the distinctive character of a brand that makes up certain personalities as human being
- *Brand Association*, specific things that deserve or always associated with a brand, can arise from a unique offering of a product.
- *Brand Behavior*, the behavior and attitude of a brand when communicating and interacting with consumers in order to offer benefits-benefits and values that it has.
- *Brand Competence & Benefit*, the values, advantages and distinctive competencies offered by a brand in solving consumer problems, which enable consumers to get benefit because their needs, desires, dreams and obsessions manifested by what it has to offer.

In this research, Author wants to know whether the perception of customers, specifically in the Pakubuwono Terrace area, about our brand image affects buying decisions more compared to price.

### *Brand Loyalty*

Brand Loyalty is the stage for heart-share, and Brand Spirituality is to achieve social-share (Wijaya, 2013). Brand loyalty is driven by customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty reflects the potential long-term choice for a brand or company. The components of customer attitudes include: intention to repurchase or purchase additional products or services from the same company, willing to recommend products or services from a company to others, showing refusal to switch to other brands. (Ji & He, 2013).

There are 4 Relative Attitude-Behavior Relationships based on Dick and Basu (1994).

Those 4 relative attitude-behavior relationships are No Loyalty, Spurious Loyalty, Latent Loyalty, and Loyalty. No loyalty can occur because of the lack of communication where a brand's distinctive points are not being communicated or the lack of the POD itself. Making customers hard to stay because there's no reason for customers not to switch to other brands.

Spurious loyalty is when customers do repeat purchases on the basis of situational cues, which can be caused by where the product is located or how easy a service provider can be accessed. The study says that social influence may also lead to spurious loyalty. A brand receives repeat orders despite low perceived differentiation from competitors that is caused by interpersonal relationships between buyers and sellers.

On other hand, latent loyalty has a relatively high attitude, with less intention to repurchase. This may be influenced by subjective norms and situational effects rather than attitudes in determining support to the brand. For example, a loyal laundry customer might switch to another brand when a service is discontinued. Last but not least, Loyalty.

Loyalty is where consumers perceive significant differences among brands and its competitors and choose to only use one significant brand compared to others. Loyalty can be achieved when a brand can actually win the competition among other brands with the same accessibility (by location, customer service, etc). While other brands might attempt to decrease perceived differentiation of our brand, Loyalty can also be achieved by always listening to what our customers with their dynamic behavior need so that we can fulfill it in a different, most-preferred way than other brands do.

Author simply wants to know what makes our customer choose a brand and what are their consideration points to use the services or product compared to other brands with the same service or products available.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Approach**

The method that will be used is phenomenology of perception. The research aims to deeply understand the phenomena of perception towards pricing, and phenomenology is the most suited methodology for that.

In conducting this research the writer uses phenomenology study method. This method is designed with the intention to discover and understand a certain case or phenomenon subject's personal experience and their perception towards those occurrences (Pambudi & Suhanti, 2017). The Author's phenomenological research begins by paying attention to and examining the focus of the phenomenon to be studied, which sees various subjective aspects of object behavior. Then, the Author did data mining in the form of how the object interpreted in giving meaning to the related phenomenon.

This data mining is carried out by conducting in-depth interviews with objects or informants in the study, as well as by making direct observations about how the research subject interprets its experiences to others. Phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring the perspective of those who have experienced it.

Phenomenology is commonly described as the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, of the way we perceive and understand phenomena, and of the meaning phenomena have in our subjective experience. More simply stated, phenomenology is the study of an individual's lived experience of the world of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019).

### **Subject of Research**

#### **Main informant**

Male & Female (25-50), active workers, who have used laundry service at least twice a month. The Author chose these informants because it's

similar to premium laundry's target market. So hopefully the insights received from this in-depth interview can benefit the brands with similar target markets in a more specific way.

### **Supporting informant**

Laundry consumers in Apartment area & non-apartment area. To see other perspectives from different types of consumer to complement the data provided by main informants.

### **Triangulating/Comparing Informant**

Laundry Owner of Kago Laundry from ASLI (Asosiasi Laundry Indonesia). Ahmad Zakky Robbany (27), has 4 active branches in the South Jakarta Area. He built Kago Laundry for the middle-up target market and is about to expand the market to South Tangerang and soon Central and West Jakarta Area. This triangulator is chosen to give an opposite perspective from consumers' point of view.

### **Data Collection**

Because this study uses the phenomenology method, the data collection techniques are carried out by:

#### ***In-depth Interview***

The in depth interview will be semi-structured. This will allow deep exploration about the issue but at the same time remains focused. The interview will be conducted through an offline platform as it will be easier to meet the customers directly at the apartment area and it's a one-on-one interview method. At first, the Author of this research would ask the informant about their availability to do the in-depth interview. After the approach is welcomed, the Author will schedule an interview based on informants' availability. However, a secondary option to do an online interview is also prepared.

Due to the pandemic situation, the Author wants the respondents to be comfortable with the situation and talk freely without worrying about the risk of covid or rushing to end the interview. If conducted offline, it will be a field interview as it will be easier to meet customers

directly at the outlet. However if it is to be conducted online, it will be a desk interview where the consumer is not located at the outlet. The online platform will be Google Meet/Hangout, Zoom or even WhatsApp Call, based on respondent familiarity. It will be direct interviews so follow up questions can be made immediately.

#### ***Field Observation***

Field observation is an observation technique where we should observe people in a real location or situation. The Author chooses to use field observation, in particular Participant Observation as the method to do this research because the Author needs to directly understand from the actual individuals that fits the target market.

As people's perception is not something that can't be tangibly quantified and might be unique, the Author needs to use a technique that ensures the deepest possible understanding of the situation. Participant observation also allows deeper exploration to understand complex theories such as the phenomenology of perception. As perception is closely related to experience, a deep understanding of one's experience and how it affects them becomes pivotal in understanding the whole phenomena, and field observation is the best way to achieve such a level of deep understanding.

Ideally, this field observation will be conducted on people near Pakubuwono Terrace Apartment as the respondents. Author will first see if the people near the area are willing to casually talk about how they perceive price as the questions are already designed prior to this observation. But as the respondents might have uniqueness on seeing price or on how they perceive price, the talk will not be limited to the question Author has made. But due to a pandemic situation, the Author has already prepared a desk observation where participants can be interviewed through a media (Google Meet or Zoom) that can give them the freedom to give the answer without worrying about the risk of Covid-19.

### Document Search

Document search is needed to complement the observation, utilized as a comparison, as well as a source to validate conceptual framework and becomes the backbone of the whole theoretical foundation. This research used online documents which are public/open in the form of scientific works where the Author uses the previous study to take key points that can give the Author the insights on relevant topics. Documents being used are strictly academics to ensure the credentials.

### Data analysis technique

Data analysis techniques in qualitative research, based on Wijaya (2015), will have the following flow:

- **Selection:** sorting out relevant and appropriate information according to research objectives tujuan
- **Categorization:** grouping information and data according to the key issues studied and other unique findings
- **Validation:** triangulation or verification of data through intersubjectivity methods between sources and subjects or informants and intertextuality between texts and documents, as well as between texts, discourses and signs.
- **Theorization:** comparing findings with previous theories, concepts and research results to find new theories or concepts or modifications of previous theories
- **Proposition:** formulating the main research findings in the form of a model concept or theoretical statement.

### Data Validity

The validity of the data is carried out to ensure the accuracy of the data so that conclusions can be drawn correctly. In this study, the author used the triangulation method, where according to Denkin (2014), triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon, it can define a combination of

various methods used to study interrelated phenomena from different points of view. Triangulation of data sources will be used as a technique for testing the validity of the data in this study.

The meaning of Triangulation of Data Sources is to explore the truth of certain information through various methods and sources of data acquisition. For example, apart from interviews and observations, authors can use participatory observation, written documents, archives, historical documents, official records, personal notes or writing as well as pictures or photos.

This study used a triangulating informant, Ahmad Zakky Robbany as the founder of Kago Laundry. The triangulating informant was chosen because it was expected to represent the brand image that was being built and that Kago Laundry was trying to communicate to consumers. And it is hoped that it can provide insight and open up new horizons that are wider from the marketers and consumers as a whole. The insights that can be obtained from his profession are expected to be a reference for Author to understand the meaning that occurs on both sides of the phenomena discussed in this study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The results of this study were obtained from the results of literature studies, observations, and in-depth interviews that have been obtained by authors during the research. The informants are Yasmin, Alfa, and Fitri, all of whom are users of laundry services and domiciled in Jakarta. Some of these respondents are also residents of Pakubuwono Terrace Apartment.

The Author seeks information by determining the informants to be studied as well as formulating criteria and compiling questions that are appropriate to ask informants related to research. After that, strengthen the questions that will be asked by referring to the theory of Phenomenology of Perception through

literature studies and other research-related sources via the internet. This research is carried out regularly by conducting in-depth online interviews. Due to the limited time and availability of the respondents, the Author interviewed respondents on weekends and in the evening adjusted respondent's available time.

## Phenomenology of Perception

### *Sensation of Price*

Price is something that must be paid for a job (both for services/process of a product being made), for boomers, the more clearly the price is explained, the easier it is for him to remember the price. Like one of the respondents, said "*I chose the Rp. 50,000 one because it was immediately understood. Compared to any other writing styles, this one is easier to memorize based on my experience since I used to see this kind of writing style at a price.*" (Ida, 23/07/21 via Zoom) when asked which one is more interesting in writing, is it written "50k" / IDR 50,000 / Rp. 50,000 / FIFTY THOUSAND".

As for young people, the shorter the price explanation, the more interesting it is for them to understand and increase their buying interest.

When asked which one is more attractive and looks cheaper/affordable, between 50k, IDR 50,000, IDR 50,000 and the one that only uses text (FIFTY THOUSAND), "*I choose 50k. The fewer people see the 0 numbers, people's interest tends to be greater than writing using the other options that have been given*" (Alfa, 10/07/21 via Zoom).

Because of the intimidation of the long series of numbers, millennials and Gen Z are increasingly reluctant to buy a price. Regarding the price, I always expect certain items to adjust to the price and durability of the price of the item. For example, paint, at a certain price, can last for such a long time. Price is believed to determine the quality of an item.

However, a more attractive experience for consumers, regardless of the price, can be seen as a 'cheap price' even though in terms of quality

it is the same as other similar products/services. Alfa (33) said that he ever try a coin laundry that was more expensive than other laundry, but because he was curious about the experience and apparently enjoyed the self-service experience he used the service for quite some time even though if we look at how much energy and time he has to put to do the self-service laundry, it was obviously not what anyone in Indonesia commonly would look for in laundry service.

### *Association and the Projection of Memory of Price.*

The color red is often associated with discounted prices which makes both boomers, millennials and gen Z more interested in seeing these prices. As for writing differently from the store's writing style, such as font size or color difference from the majority of price writing at the store, it can attract consumers to know what products are being given special treatment. Is it because of a discount or is it a new item? But more often associated with discounts.

### *Attention of Price*

There is a quality, there is a price. From what Authors got from the respondents, we cannot expect much on goods/services that have very cheap prices. However, no matter how attractive the price and quality offered by the product/service provider, it may not affect the buyer's interest if the product/service is difficult to access with different customers' limitations.

Accessibility becomes important, especially for the service sector because usually, the service sector is needed for daily needs. If the location of the service is far away, it will at least affect the costs to be incurred by the buyer.

*"A friend suggested a laundry that is a little further away with a better price and quality. I wanted to try but because there were distance barriers and no vehicles, I didn't try the laundry."* (Yasmin, 4/07/21, Jakarta)



### **Judgment of Price**

Expensive or cheap is relative. Everyone has their own variables in determining their ability to buy/label a price. However, the factors that most often appear and are mentioned by respondents when asked what factors make them judge a price, here's what pops up most often:

- a. The location where the price is offered, the appearance of the building, the arrangement of social media/marketplace content.
- b. The quality of the products/services offered, the quality itself includes the durability of an item, the taste of the food, the speed and quality of the work of a service provider. The last but not least,
- c. Accessibility. The ease of a product/service to be reached by consumers.
- d. Branding effort. A respondent (Yasmin, 25) told the Author that one day, she ordered food online. When the food arrived, her Mom asked the price of it & judged it as "expensive". She then told her Mom "No, Mom it's worth it." because the branding effort that she viewed from the brand: the packaging, the social media profile & the influencers she followed on Instagram also like the food.

Yasmin (25) also said,

*I onced went to the laundry. For example, I was offered an A/B perfume, one of which was more expensive. If that's what I wanted, I'd pay for it. If it is unique and can fulfill a need/want, I have no problem paying for a higher price. But it depends on how unique it is and how interesting it is for me (Yasmin, 4/07/21, Jakarta).*

This tells us that branding effort can also be one of the triggers on how people see the worthiness of the price. This far, people only know Kago from mouth to mouth promotion and by the amount of branches they have without really 'communicating' the values that hold onto to provide customers their best quality. Maybe having social media, gaining the number of reviews on Google or an official

website where people can find them are much needed so that people's trust can be improved.

### **Perceived Price based on respondent's experience**

#### **Positive**

After doing the research, the results show that for the respondents, the price according to them is what they have to sacrifice to get a product or service. According to them, prices also depend on where the products and services are offered. Price has a positive meaning if the other variables that accompany the price are in accordance with consumer expectations.

Regardless of the nominal value, if consumers have a need and desire to buy a product/service and have conformity with all aspects attached to the price and can meet their needs, consumers tend to consider the price to be of quality. Even for products and services that are known not to have the best quality, if other variables attached to the product/service can compensate for that, then the price can still be said to be of high quality. For example, Yasmin (25) said,

*For services, let's say my salon always repeats purchases, even though the treatment is ordinary, but because the people are kind and familiar, it's more comfortable. Even though in other places there are cheaper and better ones, the service is not polite and uncomfortable. So lazy to come back again (Yasmin, 4/07/21, Jakarta).*

As for Kago Laundry, they have to find out whether they have something that can compensate people who are willing to try their service but have limited buying power so they at least want to try the service if the other efforts are already done by Kago Laundry.

#### **Negative**

There are factors that make people judge a price. But before a person judges a price, they will first ask themselves about whether they need that product/service or not. Then they will start to think about their ability to pay the price. When it comes to discounted prices, some

people feel happy, but others actually question and tend to have a bad prejudice against the discounted goods/services. Especially on goods, if given a discount, consumers tend to think negatively and wonder 'what's wrong with this item so that it is discounted? Is it expired? Is there a broken part?' or tend to think that maybe if the object has various sizes, it could be because the size is broken.

On the other hand, in the service sector, people tend to treat discounts as an advantage, because the service sector is considered difficult to reduce quality/reduce performance if they apply discounted prices, it is because lack of performance in service will have a bad impact on the service provider itself.

Consumers are interested in a discount on an item/service, if the item/service is known not to have a decrease in quality at a lower price. This is perceived as an 'advantage' for the consumers themselves. But after all, whether they see it as an advantage or not depends on the needs they feel within themselves. Consumers are not automatically attracted to discounts, for most people, there is always a question behind the discount applied to a price.

### **Perceptual Experience of Prices and Their Relevance to Brand Image**

Every price has a mate. Price is meant for brand image, so stronger brand image comes with price. So that customer refuses to buy branded products with low prices. Good image is always associated with a higher price because a higher price is always associated with the value it has that comes with the price itself.

When people buy because of the brand, someone buys for pride in 'owning' the brand because it is considered to have a high prestige value. When people buy Christian Louboutin or Dior, they don't buy those stuff for solely the quality of the materials it used but also the pride in carrying branded, more-suitable-to-their-status, and ever well-known high price goods. Premium price is a relative measure which means that customers can be willing to pay

more for one brand. Premium pricing has a central place in branding theory, but there is still empirical research on the image of a particular brand.

There are also several elements that make up this image such as: Brand Awareness, Quality, Uniqueness, CSR, Social Image and Origin. (Anselmsson et al., 2014) But when people buy because of their ability to pay a price, the quality and pride become less important. For a middle-low market, to have the ability to buy a price itself is already a struggle for them. For this kind of market, it's not that they're not looking for quality, but if the quality doesn't meet the expectation, they won't complain or they don't even expect a good quality comes from a cheap price since the very beginning.

### **Perceptual Experience of Prices and Their Relevance to Brand Loyalty**

Price is not the driver for people to be loyal. They're concerned with a certain subjective standard of price. As long as it's affordable price based on respondent's standard they will be okay with that as long as it's easy to access. In some range of price, as long as it's tolerable based on their subjective standard, they will choose to be loyal to the brand that is more accessible for them or a product that is easy to get. For example, for the level of spurious loyalty, Alfa (33) said that,

*Beyond the need/ desire, if it is easy to get, it makes us remember the product/services. For example, near my house there is a Shell gas station, although it is more expensive (by Rp.2,000/Rp.4,000) , but because it is easier for me to reach, I will still choose Shell. It doesn't matter where it's a little bit cheaper. I tend to look for an easy one. Convenience is a deal breaker (Alfa, 10/07/21, via Zoom).*

Kago Laundry is located in a very strategic area, with a lively neighborhood (who have limited space in their area to wash clothes). If they are already in a strategic place with good association in the location, Then why do people choose other Kilo Laundry services? Do Kago

need to prioritize other things than location? That is still something to figure out.

Beyond level of loyalty, research found that there's a correlation of the accessibility where the price is offered and the price itself. If consumers' distance/access to the product is far or the service provider is difficult to reach, then no matter how cheap the price is, it will still be considered unworthy of consumers' time and energy. So that the word "expensive" not only refers to the nominal value of the price itself, but the sacrifice that we have to put to get a price where it's offered.

Consumers tend to be loyal to using products/services because they already have membership and are comfortable with people who communicate directly with them when offering prices. So the relevance between price and brand loyalty can't be proven.

What makes a person finally decide to no longer use the product/service is usually influenced by policy changes made by the provider of goods/services that cause inconvenience to consumers, or it can also be caused by the change of place of residence of the person/provider of goods/services. People choose to be loyal in general because of the overall comfort they get from the products/services they buy, both from the quality of the products/services directly, as well as the convenience of accessing and services provided by the providers of these products/services.

### **Price from the Perspective of a Business Owner.**

Price is something that cannot be generalized, when asked about the image that comes to mind when talking about prices, visually what Ahmad Zakky Robbany (27) imagines is a chat from the cashier which reads "Sir, customer bargaining the price, how is this?" Or "Sir, the customer said the price was too high." Meanwhile, the other day, "Sir, the price is cheap, the customer has doubts."

Price is not a blanket policy. Cannot be equated. The same price for some is too expensive and for others too cheap and dubious. We can't make everyone happy. So, focus on the

target market we want. If you follow the voice of the customer, there will be no end. There are those who are always dissatisfied with the price, whether it's expensive or cheap.

The factors that Zakky uses to arrange a price is to set a quality his market needs/demand based on several feasibility studies to support his business before it runs. These are the specific factors that he set for his business before he set a price:

- Variety of Services.
- Customer service.
- Frontline.

Even if they need to open the door, bring the bag, and so on. The cashier must be friendly, speak good and speak with correct Bahasa/language depending on the customer who came to the outlet.

Kago is very focused on serving the customer really well, they even also pay attention to:

- Sensory experience, including aroma, music, room temperature, all of which must provide a sense of comfort and trust in the product / service.
- Quality of service. He said, "It's like a restaurant, if you want it to be expensive, it has to be delicious. For laundry, it must be clean, neat, on time, without damage, and be responsible for mistakes that occur." (Zakky, 21/07/21, via Zoom) The point is that the quality of the services provided must be in accordance with the price given.

Feasibility studies are needed before opening a business. In this case, apart from conducting standard feasibility studies, Kago Laundry also looks at the average property price within a 2KM radius, the average price of passing vehicles & the style of people passing through the area. According to him, these three things can reflect the general purchasing power of an area, although not necessarily accurate.

Apart from the market being researched, Zakky also believes that his brand identity also has a close relationship with the price he offers.

Although the price offered is more expensive than the laundry around, Kago Laundry customers still want to entrust their clothes to Kago Laundry because of the trust that consumers have in the Kago brand itself. Adapting Japanese Ometenashi value, Kago aims to serve their customer wholeheartedly, yet elegantly. Kago tried to build this trustworthy image to their customers and Zakky thinks it's what makes Kago Laundry, Kago Laundry and that's what makes the customers really enjoy our service.

Kago believes that by communicating their value, customers will understand the brand better and it encourages people to try the service that Kago offers with a certain price. And talking about competition, Kago believes that they have something very distinct compared to other laundry.

Zakky said, *"When there is an error or damage. Other laundromats will not move, replacing at most 10x the cost of washing. For example, clothes worth 9 million, washed, then damaged. The washing fee is 90,000. 10x is only 900,000. In Kago, if it is we who did something wrong, we will replace it at the original price. Customers who experience this, on average, come back again. Because they believe there is no mistake, and if there is, we are 100% responsible."* (Zakky, 21/07/21, via Zoom).

And what does it have to do with price? The premium pricing and high margin enables that level of protection. Customers feel they have paid more, so they feel they have the right to be more protected. Customers feel that the more costs incurred are commensurate with the peace they get.

Churn can also possibly happen if the price increases are not followed by an increase in purchasing power. If they choose a cheaper competitor, maybe because of their purchasing power. As much as they trust Kago Laundry, if they can't afford it, they won't pay either. But if customers choose Kago Laundry, when the competitors with the same overall-quality are cheaper, it means they believe in Kago's quality

and feel that the higher price paid is an extra cost to buy a sense of security.

## Discussion

### Visualization of Price

At a certain price, quality and values are embedded that cannot be separated from that price. After conducting this research, many new insights were obtained regarding prices, one of which is price visualization. In interpreting price, some consumers with or without realizing that the visualization factor of a price offered can make them remember and associate the price with certain perceptions.

There are those who consider that the price written in red/written in a font size larger than the size of the other price boards indicates a special price/discounted price. Some associate the color red with a tendency to attract more consumers' attention when entering a store/viewing posts on social media because it is closely related to lower prices.

Apart from that, when asked about which one is more attractive between "50k", "IDR 50,000", "Rp. 50,000" and "FIFTY THOUSAND RUPIAH", both millennials and boomers have different answers. For boomers, the words "Rp. 50,000" is easier to remember because of years of getting used to this writing format. But when asked the same thing to a number of millennials, "50k" became the most attractive choice. According to millennials, the shorter the price visualization, the easier it will be for the head to understand and remember. The lack of a "0" that accompanies the price writing style is also considered no more intimidating than other writing styles. The common thread of the two different answers above is that humans have their respective capacities to remember a price. The existence of these limits makes humans tend to remember what has been seen repeatedly and which is considered the easiest to remember.

This is supported by an existing theory which says that high attention capacity limits greatly affect the effectiveness of information

visualization, especially the ability to detect unexpected information. The implication is that a high attention span has a profound effect on the observer's ability to digest information from the display. Even visual features such as color, size and other attributes of a visualization can have a negative effect and are considered a task that demands a great deal of attention. (Haroz & Whitney, 2012)

Visuals do matter. The sensory system takes so much part in determining people's memory & experience. Whether it's taken as a cheap price or an expensive price, customers can still memorize it vividly as long as brands can make their brand personality interesting, or the price tells the number that they can afford or as long as the visuals (where the price is being offered) are pretty distinct.

Kago Laundry, with their pricing should try to strategize more on how they can set their price attractive to their target market in the specific area and make it distinct so that people will memorize their price better. All this time, Kago Laundry hasn't really expose their price, that maybe it makes people unwilling to 'know more' when the time they have to drop their laundry is limited and it's too risky for them to drop their laundry at the place that they're not knowing how much it cost to wash their laundry, the risk is that they don't have enough money to pay or they are just too lazy to adapt to new things.

### **Valuation of Price**

"Value price" is often misinterpreted as low price or package price. Rather, the essence of true value lies in the tradeoff between the benefits a customer receives from a product and the price he or she pays for it.

The customer does not buy at a price alone, but buys according to a value that is meaningful to the customer themselves: between the benefits provided by the product they buy and the price charged to them. Customer value is customer perceived benefit (-) customer perceived price. Thus, the higher the perceived benefits and/or the lower the price of a product,

the higher the customer value and the more likely the customer will choose to continue using the product. (Leszinski & Marn, 1997).

Based on the results of the research, the author begins to understand that in determining prices, there are things beyond the control of business owners that cannot be avoided. No matter how perfect we are in providing added-value to a price offered, there are situational conditions that make customers have their own perception of the price we offer. However, as a business owner, there are many factors that often go unnoticed when determining a price, and some of these factors can still be tested so that the price offered by a brand is more in line with the target market.

This research found that communicating our true value or added value that our products have become so critical. Because based on the explanation about how customers are actually perceiving the price and their situational condition, we cannot rely on our 'price' alone when selling our products be it on goods or service. That being said, people will only know whether it's worth it or not based on the information they get about the product that they consciously or unconsciously compare to their needs.

### **Standardization of Price**

Our findings show that, aside from how to communicate the personality of a brand, the uniqueness of a product is also considered capable of being a price booster. Especially for the uniqueness that really answers the needs of consumers. This reveals that the price standard that is perceived as cheap or expensive is very subjective. Prices are qualitative, not quantitative. Consumers determine the standard price that is worth respecting depending on the unique value of the product and brand. And this uniqueness must be communicated intensively by producers to consumers/customers.

Different branding materials can also affect the way consumers perceive prices. Because the effort given in building brand personality

between brands that do branding and brands that are mediocre without branding is different. Again, communication is key. Appropriate strategies, such as discourse angles, message framing, narrative concepts or scenarios, execution designs (fonts, colors, illustrations, ornaments, shapes) as well as the frequency and weight of communication have the potential to influence or change the perception of standardization of prices in the eyes of consumers.

Another case is when people tend to buy branded goods because of their price. It is often associated with premium goods/service that is targeting middle-up to high profile customers that are categorized as 'Premium Customers'. Word 'premium' is always associated with higher price and so does for premium goods/services. One of the strongest determinants of premium price are brand and its social image, uniqueness of the product and goods/service origin. A brand can charge a premium price when customers are willing to pay for the brand's products higher than the amount they could pay for a similar product from another brand (Aaker, 1996). This is where Kago Laundry wants to stand as a brand, they believe that people with buying power will demand for quality first before asking their ability to pay.

Kago Laundry started to doubt the market in Pakubuwono Terrace Apartments area because they tend to choose other Kilo Laundry with cheaper price than Kago, even with lower quality assurance for their Kilo Laundry. Meanwhile for branded goods, the customers choose to drop it at Kago Laundry. This shows us that people have their own standard based on their subjective needs & ability to pay. But one thing for sure, when it turns to something more precious or valuable for them, they dare to pay a higher price and do what it takes to protect it. In this case, more than being trusted for customers' daily clothes, Kago Laundry was chosen to protect their valuable goods. Kago Laundry doesn't play much with discounts or

everyday low pricing, maybe this is why people tend to trust their valuable goods to Kago Laundry because the price it offers is not too-good-to-be-true for their valuable goods which is taken as just worth it.

Conceptually, several authors describe the price premium as the most useful indicator of brand equity (Blackston, 1995; Aaker, 1996; Sethuraman, 2000). The premium price is related to the willingness to pay, which does not always reflect the true price. When the price falls or is discounted they refuse to become loyal to the brand. Because the so-called "benefit" is from the values & pride of the high price itself.

Compared to theories mentioned above, it's clear that everyone has their own interpretation of price and low price is not necessarily seen as a positive point when determining the price itself from the perspective of the customers.

### *Sweet Price Never Dies*

In the Journal of Marketing Research, Lichtenstein et al. (1993) said that:

*There's a situation where people memorize prices better when it gives negative experience. Meanwhile when they experience a so-so or positive experience about a product/service, they tend to remember the price much less than the one that gives us a negative experience (p. 236).*

In this research, customers found that memorizing prices is better when they have good experience with the price & memorize it as a positive memory and it locks the image of a good-quality brand with good-quality price for their subjective affordability. And the research result above gives us a new insight: Visuals do matter. The sensory system takes so much part in determining people's memory & experience. Whether it's taken as a cheap price or an expensive price, customers can still memorize it vividly as long as brands can communicate their position of the social image they are trying to maintain, or the price tells the number that they can afford or as long as the visuals (where the price is being offered) are pretty distinct. What

truly give customers the good impression are when the factors such as:

- Price (stability & affordability of price)
- Customers situational condition (accessibility & certain needs)
- Quality
- Branding effort (through customers' experience), and
- Strong brand positioning.

Meet customers' most-loved criteria. Sweet price never dies, it's like the customers meet 'the one' they need in their entire life and no matter how expensive or far it is, they will always find a way to achieve it. And when their most-loved criteria is affordable and accessible for them to get, they will really appreciate the price and potentially be a loyal customer.

On the other hand, when they think the price is not as 'valuable' for them, they won't bother looking or even buying the price, because for them it's just another fish in the sea (or just another price in the market).

### ***Every Price Has a Mate***

High prices are usually associated with quality and high-class or premium images, so consumers can't seem to easily accept/believe that a brand with a good image lowers their price, and instead can cause/raise suspicion about the low price and start to question the reason behind the discounted or lower price itself instead of being attracted to buy the product. The brand owner/Brand manager should not arbitrarily lower the price, because every price has a mate.

The same applies to products with standard or even low quality. If consumers accept the quality, it must be because there is a low price that comes with it without specifically wanting to get the pride benefits of the product. If the quality is known to be mediocre/even low given a high price, then it is definitely considered not worth it and will worsen the brand image of the product itself.

When the price is deemed as equal to the value that consumers will get, the purchase

intention will escalate as explained by Setiawan et al. (2016). This research found that when consumers are told about the advantages or uniqueness of a product that can fulfill their needs/meet their preferences, then they tend to accept higher prices and are willing to pay for the added value. We can see that premium prices could be accepted when they are well communicated to the consumer, cheaper prices are not always better and at times it could create a question mark among customers. Thus, it becomes pivotal to ensure that an image that the brand tries to portray suits the pricing to avoid doubt and to create perception of price fairness.

These results are aligned with a previous theory by Dodds and Monroe (1985) that said how price has correlation towards perceived quality. Price needs to match the branding, otherwise it would create either suspicion or lack of interest to buy. This research found that consumers associate price with quality, and eventually expect higher quality to come along with higher price.

However when it comes to willingness to buy, perception of quality is not enough. Some people would agree that quality comes with price, but their buying power will eventually cap their decision to buy. This research also found that if the consumers had a good experience with certain prices over certain products/services before, then the quality of price offered can be adjusted according to their ability to buy. Besides the product that consumers might believe that it has a good quality, their willingness to buy also depends on their income. Consumers measure from the existing income whether they can buy the goods/services repeatedly in the required amount every certain period of time. Willingness does not always translate into ability, and eventually consumers would not even be bothered by a quality product or services outside their spending range. Every price has a mate, and for some, quality products are simply not affordable.

### **'Price-less' Loyalty**

It turns out that loyalty is 'worthless', in the sense that it has nothing to do with price. Loyalty is very situational (spurious), depending on the surrounding situation, such as location, access, etc. no matter how much it costs. This can be referred to as 'opportunistic conditional loyalty'. So it's not the price that triggers loyalty, but certain favorable conditions. Therefore, to trigger loyalty, the 'favorable conditions and opportunism' must be considered, including (rather than playing with price, it is better) to create other promo programs and favorable conditions in the membership system. This proposition is supported by Virvalaite et al.'s (2009) study which found that relationship rewards have influence on customers' satisfaction that in turn determines customers' loyalty. Another study by Widagdo (2013) indicated that perceived price has a positive effect on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. That being said, this indicates that price and loyalty are not directly related.

Meanwhile, a research by Razy and Lajevardi (2015) stated that price discount could further increase purchase intention as it could bring down a product into buyer's price range. However when it comes to loyalty, we found a disagreement with that statement. People who are loyal due to non-financial factors such as convenience, trust or accessibility would not be bothered by discounts. Even further, discount has a negative stigma in itself. Majority of respondents said that they often think of the reason behind the discounted price and tend to treat it as a marked up price which at the end of the day will ultimately benefit the sellers. They think that in the end, they still pay for what should be paid. Their loyalty towards their current brand will not be shaken by temporary discounts given by the competitors.

An everyday low pricing strategy however is different compared to price discount. Loyalty often is not shaken by discounts, but consumers could be loyal to cheap prices. This is highly related to their buying power mentioned in the

previous sub chapter. This research found that consumers' buying power will eventually put some brands in their personal blacklist due to unaffordable prices, moreover on services that will be used in frequent manner like laundry. If they can only afford the cheaper brand, despite convincing quality offered by nearby competitors, they would not be bothered to move away as their budget locks their loyalty to their current provider.

Loyalty is price-less, they are not shaken by the price discount. Loyalty however, could be tied down to a low price capped by personal budget, a devotion with no escape.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Conclusion**

In correlation to the first purpose of this research which was to understand the meaning of price we can conclude that respondents see price as a trade-off that they have to sacrifice to obtain a product or service at a particular level. Furthermore, along with the aim to understand their perception towards price, we can conclude that people have positive correlation between price with quality and brand. They see a strong link between a price offered with expectation towards quality and service that brand gives. When consumers find a mismatch, they tend to doubt the situation, whether they doubt the price that is too good to be true or question a premium price that is being charged.

This research also tries to find out the implications towards brand image derived from consumer's perceptual experience on the premium price. We can see a pattern from the respondents that has accumulated an internal behaviour to question premium price. As a result, whenever they are faced with a premium price, their first reaction will be to seek a justification towards the value of product or services that they encounter. These values could be tangible such as technical specification, SLA, or other measurable product or services promises, or intangible, including things such as emotional gain like pride and joy. When



consumers think that the values offered are fair for either tangible or intangible values they prefer, they will be consented to the brand image aimed by the brand itself. Whenever consumers see premium price, due to their perceptual experience on premium price puts them on an unconscious default journey to validate the price through its association to brand image. If and only if a brand passed that consumer's validation journey, it is when a brand image is accepted and agreed by the consumers.

This thesis also answers the last initial question of implications towards brand loyalty derived from consumer's perceptual experience on the premium price. Loyalty is a derivation of satisfaction, and satisfaction is achieved when reality meets or exceeds expectation. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, premium prices work as a trigger for customers to question and validate the value that they are getting. The more premium a price is, the more critical consumers are. Loyal consumer's loyalty to a service will not be shaken by cheap prices from competitors, but will be weakened when customers are disappointed that their expectations are no longer met. However, based on customer's perceptual experience of premium price, they will be more sensitive to changes in quality delivered as they tend to seek for the validity of the price that they are being charged.

### Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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