

## BRAND IMAGE OF A GLOBAL AUTOMOTIVE BRAND: DOES MARKETING MIX STILL WORK THE CHARM?

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores how the brand image of a legacy automaker like Toyota adapts in the face of increasing competition in eco-friendly vehicles and advanced technology. We examine how customers perceive Toyota's product quality and pricing strategies in relation to brand image and purchase decisions. Through a survey of 170 customers, we utilize a covariance-based structural equation model (CB-SEM) to analyze the data. Interestingly, our findings suggest that product quality does not directly influence brand image, nor does it have an indirect effect on buying decisions. However, other hypothesized relationships within the model were supported. This implies that for established brands like Toyota, price competitiveness might be a more significant factor for a large segment of their customer base. Toyota's focus on price competitiveness could potentially deter new entrants, allowing them to refine their offerings with more strategic pricing.

**Keywords:** Product Quality; Price; Brand Image; Buying Decision; Global-Automotive Brands

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The business landscape is characterized by heightened competition, compelling companies to continuously innovate and enhance their creative output to gain a competitive advantage within their respective industries. Manufacturers are adept at updating their product lines and prioritizing incorporating customer needs into their development processes (Ngian et al., 2023). This translates into transforming traditional offerings into exciting new products boasting increased sophistication, advanced features, and a plethora of additional functionalities that cater to driver comfort, safety, and more. Notably, manufacturers are making these advancements while ensuring affordability and offering consumer-friendly payment options (Guan et al., 2024a; Niu et al., 2024).

The automotive industry stands out as one of the fastest-growing industrial sectors. The Chairman of the Association of Indonesian Automotive Industries (GAIKINDO) attributes the rise in car sales to the nation's improving economic climate. However, a new challenge is emerging: the focus on manufacturing innovative, eco-friendly vehicles to combat carbon dioxide emissions is reshaping market dynamics. This necessitates careful product launch strategies for manufacturers, as similar companies fiercely compete to market their offerings and achieve their sales targets (Guan et al., 2024b).

This evolving environment necessitates a reformulation of marketing strategies. Key factors demonstrably influence consumer purchasing decisions, including product quality, perceived Price, and brand image (Zhou & Gao, 2024). As a rule, consumers seek high-quality products at affordable prices (Zhou & Gao, 2024). Zhou and Gao (2024) outline the consumer purchase decision journey, which consists of five stages: 1) problem recognition, 2) information retrieval, 3) evaluation of alternatives, 4) purchase decision, and 5) post-purchase behavior. This framework emphasizes the abundance of choices available to consumers, empowering them to assess their options and make informed decisions (Hyun et al., 2024; Rukmi et al., 2024; Xue et al., 2024).

In light of these consumer trends, automotive brands must strategically leverage their past successes to cultivate a positive brand experience (Afef, 2024). Brand image is defined as the consumer's perception of a product's image, encompassing three key aspects: 1) memorability, ensuring the brand is easily recalled and mentioned, with logos, icons, and names designed for attractiveness and uniqueness (Balabanis & Lopez, 2022; Yu et al., 2022). 2) recognizability, which relates to the brand's established messaging and product presentation (Balabanis & Lopez, 2022; Yu et al., 2022). This trademark becomes a differentiator for products and services through consistent communication, often backed by legal protection. 3) positive brand reputation, reflecting the public's perception of the company's image, fostering positive brand associations within the customer base (Afef, 2024). This research proposal delves into the intricate relationship between brand image and purchase decisions from the perspective of Toyota customers. It aims to contribute to the academic understanding of price-quality comparisons among Indonesian consumers.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

Sales, purchase, transaction, and commerce may sound interchangeable, but do these words have the same meaning as marketing? (Alzate et al., 2022). Some misconceptions may lead to a mistaken view of marketing efforts (Abedsoltan et al., 2022). When people talk about marketing, they usually talk about marketing or buying and pricing; on the other hand, salespeople and sales managers mention it regarding sales (Li et al., 2022). Another mention comes from the retailers that believe that marketing means retail sales. In principle, the above restrictions apply to activities related to companies that offer goods or services that they produce at a specific price. This narrow interpretation of marketing is also found in the definition of past academics (Watanuki & Akama, 2022; Crisafulli et al., 2022), as concluded in the notion of “from producer to consumer of consumption” (Halbauer et al., 2022).

The biggest problem at the heart of marketing is that management thinking is oriented toward production (Sarasvuo et al., 2023). As the number of goods produced increases and efforts to meet human needs increase, commercial activities, and business distribution emerge that move goods from the hands of producers to consumers. At that time, marketing activities were centered on sales activities. Competition arises between producers to get their products into the hands of consumers (Turjo et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). This contest led to the introduction of promotional activities in addition to sales and distribution activities. Management philosophy at that time has evolved from a production orientation to sales. Therefore, various types of goods and services are provided to meet the needs of society, such as hunger, thirst, rest, sexual needs, and critical needs to overcome biological needs (physiological needs) (Guan et al., 2024c). As a result, marketing activities are carried out more broadly and integrated (integrated marketing events) to include sales and promotion, product development, pricing, and service to customers (Xu et al., 2023). From the development of marketing research described above, it is clear that marketing has developed, emerged, and grown in a society with a limited economic system where the existing community meets its needs through its production (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2021).

This conversation leads to the redefinition of marketing management as the process of planning and implementing ideas, pricing, and promotion, as well as distributing ideas, goods, and services to create an exchange that meets personal and organizational goals (Elhajjar, 2023; Klein & Sharma, 2022a). This definition recognizes it as an exchange-based process of analysis, planning, implementation, and control aimed at creating satisfaction among the parties involved. From the marketing planning perspective, marketers must determine the target market, product positioning, product development, pricing, distribution channels, logistics, communication, and advertising (Klein & Sharma, 2022). The previous explanations are consistent with the arguments of early researchers regarding product quality (Brady et al., 2002; Brady & Cronin, 2001), with emotion playing a role in it (Brady et al., 2001). The previous explanations are consistent with the arguments of early researchers regarding product quality (Brady et al., 2002; Brady & Cronin, 2001), with emotion playing

a role in it (Brady et al., 2001). The price premium is essential for a favorable brand image (Persson, 2010). The societal norms reflect post-use perceptions and drivers of the changes in consumer purchase intentions (Gaur et al., 2015), with Price as the consistent determinant (Beneke et al., 2015) for hypothesis development and conceptualization (see Figure 1).

*H1. Product Quality has a positive and significant influence on the brand image of Toyota cars in Makassar City*

*H2. Price positively and significantly affects the brand image of Toyota cars in Makassar City.*

*H3. Product quality has a positive and significant effect on Toyota car purchasing decisions in Makassar City*

*H4. Price positively and significantly affects the decision to buy Toyota cars in Makassar City.*

*H5. Brand image positively and significantly influences Toyota car purchase decisions in Makassar City.*

*H6. Product quality through brand image has a positive and significant influence on Toyota car purchasing decisions in Makassar City*

*H7. Price through brand image positively and significantly influences Toyota car purchase decisions in Makassar City.*

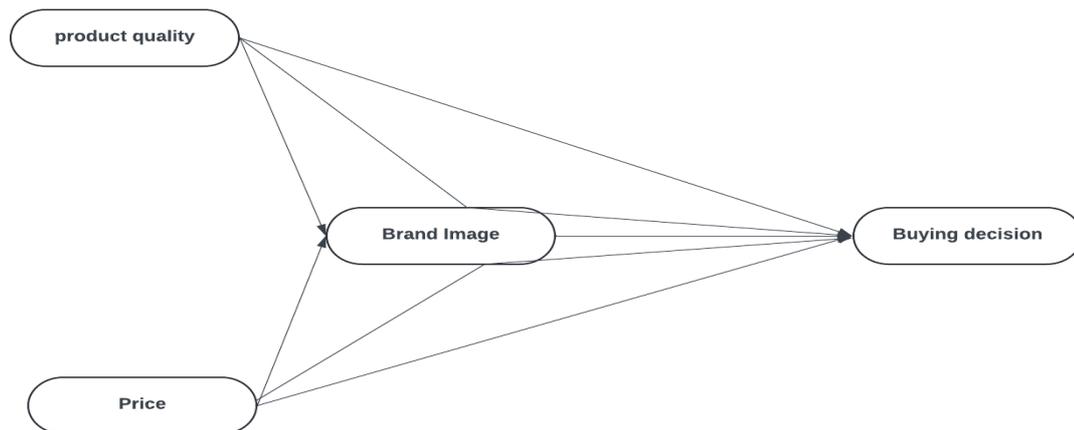


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach by constructing working hypotheses in statistical analysis. It constructs correlational research by connecting two or more variables through data collection, processing, analysis, and explaining. The study was conducted at several Toyota global dealers in Indonesia. The total population is not defined and thus follows the proposal of sample selection by the multiplication of ten to independent paths toward dependent constructs (Hair et al., 2014). In addition, descriptive statistical analysis is also used to explain respondents' responses to research variables, including product quality, Price, and brand image, to purchasing decisions (Agnihotri et al., 2024). The study maximizes the construction of covariance-based structural equation modeling using the IBM-AMOS software. This technique allows the investigation of inferential statistics of the hypothesized

relationships. This approach will enable the confirmatory factor analysis to estimate several equations simultaneously. Several steps are prevalent as this study reinforces the reliability test, i.e., Cronbach's alpha, using the SPSS 26 software (Table 1 for clarification). This study then analyses the goodness of fit for the data fitness, with critical attention to the degree of freedom, RMSEA, and GFI (see Table 2). This study presents the graphical presentation in Figure 2, reflecting the initial measurement of the data, and Figure 3, after doing the modification index. The presentation of Figure 3 reflects the changes in the goodness of fit from the model after modification.

## RESULTS

The research instrument is first analyzed to clarify the validity of the indicators. This study calculates the correlation coefficient product moment  $> r$  table ( $\alpha = n-2$ ) where  $n$  is the number of samples. A sample of 175 respondents follows the formula  $175-2 = 173$ ; thus, 5% of its degree of freedom is 173 or 0.148 for a valid model. The next is the reliability test to measure the internal consistency of the indicators by observing Cronbach's alpha, as evident in Table 2.

Table 1. Variable Reliability Test Results

No	Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
1	Product Quality (X1)	0,749	Reliable
2	Price (X2)	0,719	Reliable
3	Brand Image (Y)	0,816	Reliable
4	Buying Decision (Z)	0,750	Reliable

Source: Adapted SPSS 26 output

Based on the predetermined model, the construction of the model is grouped into exogenous and endogenous variables. Exogenous variables are variables with the notation of X1 (product quality), X2 (Price), and Y (brand image). They form direct relationships in the initial model. The endogenous variable is visible from the z notation (buying decision), serving as the final dependent variable of analysis. The initial model construction in the SEM analysis, as in Figure 2, reveals the data that needs sufficient improvement as the goodness fit indexes still require modification.

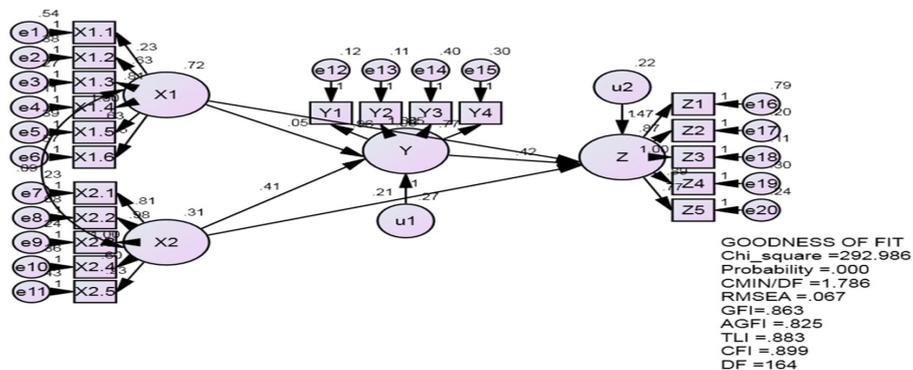


Figure 2. Outer Model Persentation

The index modification is executed to improve the model quality and consistency. This study connects several error standards to model reformulation and discovers a better model representation, as in Figure 3. The evaluation is conducted based on the improvement of goodness-of-fit.

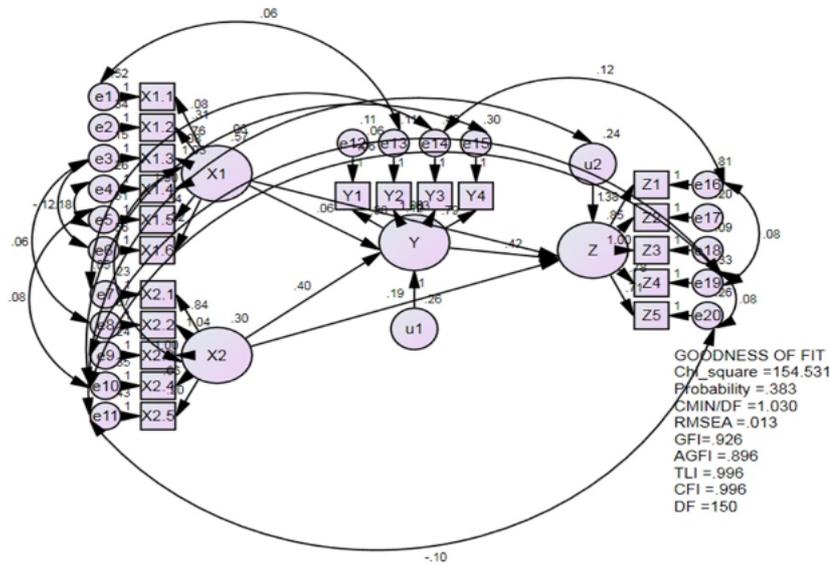


Figure 3. Final Measurement of Variable Relationship Model

Table 2 shows that of the 8 (eight) criteria, seven indexes meet the cut-off value. Thus, the model above shows a good level of acceptance, and the model is acceptable, so the model as a whole is said to be based on the facts and can be analyzed further.

Table 2. The Summary of the Goodness of Fit Post Modification

Indexes	Cut-off Value	Results	Decision
Chi_Square	Small	154.531 (0.05:150=179.58)	Close fit
Probability	≥ 0.05	0.383	Close fit
CMIN/DF	≤ 2.00	1.030	Close fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.013	Close fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.926	Close fit
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.896	Marginal fit
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.996	Close fit
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.996	Close fit

Source: Adapted IBM-AMOS output

Based on the empirical model quality analysis, it yields a decision to progress to the statistical analysis. Table 3 summarizes the information from the IBM-AMOS output on the inferential statistics test. The relevance and the significance of relationships are presented. Furthermore, the data needs to reinterpret the magnitude of the relationships as it is critical in decision-making. This study presents the findings alternatively through direct and mediation analysis.

Table 3. The Summary of Relationships

No.	Paths	Standardized	Indirect	Total	P-value	Decision
1	Product quality-> Brand image	0.074	-	0.074	0.358	Rejected
2	Price-> Brand image	0.394	-	0.394	0.000	Accepted
3	Brand image->Buying decision	0.150	-	0.150	0.046	Accepted
4	Price->Buying decision	0.180	-	0.180	0.034	Accepted
5	Brand image->Buying decision	0.406	-	0.406	0.000	Accepted
6	Product quality->Brand image->Buying decision	0.150	0.030	0.180	0.368	Rejected
7	Price->Brand image->Buying decision	0.180	0.159	0.339	0.001	Accepted

The information in Table 3 reveals the acceptance of all proposed hypotheses aside from the relationships between product quality, brand image, and subsequent buying decisions, directly or indirectly. This condition is reconstructed to analyze the managerial implications, as will be discussed carefully.

## DISCUSSION

This study discovers the rejection of the first hypothesis, as product quality does not predict brand image. This could be due to the brand's established global reputation for quality (Park, H., & Kim, 2016). Consumers worldwide might hold Toyota to a high standard, and as long as the quality remains consistent (even if not constantly improving), it might not directly affect brand image. Toyota is well-known as Indonesia's market leader, thus creating illusions of quality. Furthermore, this realized result shows a substantial finding that Indonesian consumers are price-sensitive (Hsu et al., 2017).

The relationship between the Price and the brand image of Toyota is supported. It is globally understood that a higher price tag might be associated with better quality and exclusivity, potentially strengthening the brand image (Ahmed et al., 2022; Persson, 2010; R. Arlanda, 2018; Sachdev & Verma, 2004). This effect could be particularly pronounced in developing markets as indicative of superior quality. However, it may be negatively perceived in price-sensitive regions with solid competition (Sari & Siti, 2020; Afifah & Kurniawati, 2021; Rita et al., 2019). Several factors likely intertwine to create a price-centric car buying environment for Indonesians considering Toyota. As part of a growing middle class in a developing nation, Indonesians prioritize affordability due to limited disposable income (Ahmed, 2020). This value-conscious mindset compels them to meticulously evaluate the perceived benefits received for the Price (Akarsu & Yeniaras, 2014). While Toyota's brand reputation is established, a high price tag might translate into something other than additional perceived value for some Indonesians when competitors offer comparable quality at a lower price point. Furthermore, cultural aspects play a role (Mele et al., 2021; Muharto et al., 2022). Indonesian car ownership might be more about practicality and fulfilling daily

needs rather than projecting a specific social status, reinforcing the finding of this notion.

This research confirms a strong positive correlation between brand image and buying decisions. A strong brand image built on reliability, safety, and durability translates to trust and confidence for global customers (Solihin, 2021). This trust, in turn, significantly influences buying decisions across various markets. This aligns with marketing principles, where a strong brand image instills trust and confidence (Ricadonna et al., 2021), making consumers more likely to choose Toyota as their ride.

Unsurprisingly, Price is a significant factor in buying decisions for automotive consumers, which is also true for Toyota. While brand image plays a crucial role, price sensitivity varies significantly across regions (Persson, 2010). Toyota's pricing strategy needs to consider this local value interplay. In price-conscious markets, offering competitive pricing alongside the established brand image becomes essential to secure customer interest (Grewal et al., 1998; Hsu et al., 2017). This research might be specific to a particular market or region. Further studies in different contexts could provide additional insights. It would be valuable to explore the reasons behind the price-brand image relationship. Are consumers associating higher prices with better quality (Lee, 2015; Zhong & Moon, 2020), or is a different dynamic at play?

The Indonesian market for Toyotas presents an interesting case where the established relationship between product quality, brand image, and buying decisions could be more precise. While globally, Toyota enjoys a stellar reputation for quality; this dynamic seems less pronounced in Indonesia. This does not necessarily negate the importance of quality (Gotama & Indarwati, 2019), as Toyota would only have achieved its global standing with it. However, the interplay between price sensitivity and local value perception takes center stage in the Indonesian market (Ahmed, 2020). Here, the focus seems to be on affordability and practicality (Wang & Chen, 2016), potentially leading some consumers to prioritize a lower initial price, even if it means sacrificing some quality bells and whistles. This does not diminish Toyota's brand image entirely, but its influence on buying decisions might be dampened compared to other markets where price sensitivity is less acute.

## **CONCLUSION**

This investigation into the interplay between product quality, brand image, and buying decisions for Toyota in Indonesia revealed some unexpected results. While a positive correlation between product quality and brand image is typically observed, this research suggests a muted effect in the Indonesian market. This does not diminish the inherent value of Toyota's quality but highlights the importance of price sensitivity and local value perceptions. Interestingly, Price emerged as a significant factor influencing brand image, potentially due to associations with exclusivity or superior quality within this market. Both product quality and Price directly influence buying decisions, underlining their independent importance. However, the indirect influence of product quality on buying decisions channeled through brand image appeared

negligible. This suggests that for Indonesian consumers, the path to purchase is more directly driven by affordability and practicality, with brand image potentially playing a less prominent role compared to markets where price sensitivity is less acute. These findings offer valuable insights for Toyota as they tailor their strategies to this unique market dynamic.

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