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HOW TO BUILD THE BRAND IMAGE OF GREEN CAR, THROUGH WORD OF MOUTH OR PRICE FAIRNESS?

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ABSTRACT

Green car is a new segment in the automotive industry. So, it needs brand image development to increase its sales. Brand image development can be done by optimizing the marketing mix program, such as communicating the green car through word of mouth, or offering the car at a fair and affordable price. This study aims to discuss how big the impacts of word of mouth and price fairness are in building the brand image of green car in Indonesia. Research data were collected using a questionnaire distributed to green car buyers in Jakarta (Indonesia) dealers. Further, the data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Lisrel. The results of this study indicate that word of mouth and price fairness have impacts on brand image. However, the contribution of word of mouth is less than price fairness. This condition is due to the less-active involvement of dealers in communicating the fuel consumption of the green car.

INTRODUCTION

Green car as a new segment in the automotive industry is supported by five companies: Toyota (Agya), Daihatsu (Ayla), Honda (Brio Satya), Suzuki (Wagon R), and Nissan (Go). In order to enhance the inter-brand competition, they have to build their brand image by implementing marketing mix program. An important part of the program is promotion. One of the most effective ways to influence consumer attitude is the word of mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2001). A brand image can be built by actively exploiting the strength of WOM to build consumer attitude and behaviour. However, such a word-of-mouth communication for green car is not supported by dealers. They are worried that the WOM method can become a boomerang for the brand image. Green car means that such a car consumes low quantity of fuel so that consumers have a high expectation of

its fuel efficiency. Actually, fuel consumption much depends on the consumer's driving habit. This leads to an important question: does word of mouth influence the brand image development?

The existing choices of brands make the consumers' involvement higher in buying a car. Price is an important element for consumer purchasing (Herrmann, Monroe, Huber, & Xia, 2007). The price for the green car segment is the lowest among the prices of cars in Indonesia (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Price v/s Market Share for Green Car in Indonesia (2014)*

Brand	Toyota	Daihatsu	Honda	Suzuki	Nissan
Price	(Agya)	(Ayla)	(Brio)	(Wagon R)	(Go)
Price (in million)	(99.9 – 120.8)	(77.8 – 115.4)	(106.6 – 117.6)	(83.2 – 103.5)	(85.3 – 100.3)
Market Share (%)	40.7	26.3	14.7	11.2	7.2

Source: Gaikindo (2014)

The different prices among the brands in this segment may result in price unfairness (for example, the price of Toyota Agya is the most expensive one compared to the prices of green cars from other brands). This will influence the purchase intention which is reflected by the market share. Maxwell (1995) explains that low price is one of the factors which influences buying intention. This contradicts the phenomena presented in Table 1, in which the highest market share (44.2%) is achieved by Toyota-Agya, the brand with the highest price, not the lowest one.

Some conditions can cause perceived price unfairness in the process of car purchase. For example, when the demand is high, the dealers reduce the discount so that consumers should pay more and the dealers get more profit than in a normal condition. Meanwhile, consumers need the car as soon as possible so that they do not have any choice. Such a condition makes consumers feel that the price being offered is not fair. According to the principle of *dual entitlement* (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986), no parties are beneficial for other parties' loss.

Second, the price list available in every dealer is similar. However, the discounts given to consumers vary. In general, consumers know that the amount of discount can be negotiated. So, the prices being offered are different as well. Some consumers will compare their purchase to that of other consumers, other dealers (equity theory (Adams, 1965) and distributive fairness (Homans, 1974)) concerning the expectation or experience that they will get. This can trigger a feeling of *unfair* when a consumer knows that the price being offered to him is higher than that offered to others.

Third, the increasing price of cars due to an increase in production cost will trigger consumers' perceptions of price (un)fairness, since the consumers feel that they suffer a loss and the dealers take too much profit (Kahneman et al., 1986). This condition is acceptable to consumers if the sellers give appropriate reasons for the price increase (Bolton, Warlop, & Alba, 2003;

Xia, Monroe, & Cox, 2004). For example, the price increase is caused by the changing value of currency.

In such a condition, it is interesting to examine the influence of price on brand image. Do consumers feel that the price difference offered is (un)fair? Can the price offered be accepted and fair? Does price fairness influence the brand image?

The issue of brand image development in the automotive industry for the green car segment is still underexplored. By understanding the influence of word of mouth and price fairness in developing brand image, it is expected that this research could help Companies develop their brand strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word of Mouth (WOM)

WOM is one of promotion methods in marketing that can build consumer expectation. Thus, it can influence consumer decisions in choosing the available products. WOM is the oldest way of exchanging opinions concerning goods and services offered in the market. According to Arndt (1967, p. 3) "WOM is defined as oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product, or a service". The concept of WOM grows along with the advancement of communication technology. According to Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron, and Marticotte (2010), WOM is an informal oral communication which takes place in a direct way, through telephone, email, mail list, or other communication methods concerning goods and services.

There are two sides of WOM communication, namely communicator side and receiver side. This is in line with the view of Harrison-Walker (2001) that WOM is an informal, person to person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service. Research by Harrison-Walker (2001) measured it in the perspective of communicator, while other studies using receiver perspective are those conducted by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) and Jalilvand and Samiei (2012). The dimensions of word of mouth which used are "general persuasiveness, general credibility, and susceptibility".

According to Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011), WOM communication is more influential than communications through other sources such as editorial recommendation or advertisement because it is considered as giving relatively reliable information. This is in line with the opinion of Engel, Blackwell, and Kegerreis (1969) who state that WOM is more effective than traditional marketing, personal selling tools, and various kinds of advertisement. As a result, this kind of communication is considered as having great *persuasiveness* through *credibility* and trust which are felt higher (Chatterjee, 2001; Mayzlin, 2006). Meanwhile, *susceptibility* is adapted from Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989) who propose the measurement of *susceptibility* toward interpersonal influence.

Price Fairness

Price fairness is defined as "a consumer's assessment and associated emotions of whether the difference (or lack of difference) between a seller's price and the price of a comparative other party is reasonable, acceptable, or

justifiable” (Xia et al., 2004, p. 3). In order to determine price fairness or price acceptability, Maxwell (1995) divides it into two, namely economically acceptable and socially acceptable. Economically acceptable consists of cheap and lowest possible mark up. On the other hand, socially acceptable consists of a price based on cost, quality, and affordability to everyone, giving customers accurate information, a price based on market forces, value to customers, same price to everyone, and choices. In many cases, customers may consider fair price as another way to express lower price (Darke & Dahl, 2003). This is what customers like because it fulfills their personal expectation. The price is personally considered as fair and equitable (Maxwell, 2002). This is relevant to Bolton et al. (2003) stating that price difference can be justified by cost difference, and price difference is frequently interpreted in terms of quality difference. However, price is also considered as unfair when it does not fulfill people’s expectation. People expect the price to comply with social norms, such as equality and need.

This study employs the concept of price fairness from Xia et al. (2004) and uses the dimension from Xia et al. (2004) modified in accordance with the car purchasing process in Indonesia. When consumers want to buy a car, they compare the price and expectation of the achievement of product being offered (Herrmann et al., 2007). The dimensions of price fairness used are: (1) choice of comparison party, (2) consumer’s knowledge, and (3) buyer-seller relationship.

(1) Choice of comparison party.

Price fairness is assessed both subjectively from the buyer’s point of view and evaluated comparatively (Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004). Xia et al. (2004) state that price fairness as the consumer’s evaluation related to the emotion toward different prices being offered by other parties is reasonable, acceptable or justifiable. In the price comparison (equity theory), there are three aspects as the comparative reference which can be used by consumers: self, other customers, or other dealers (different dealers). This is different from the dual entitlement principle of price comparison which uses past prices, competitor’s prices, and costs (Bolton et al., 2003).

In this study, the used price comparisons are: other customers, different dealers (equity theory), and competitor’s price. Meanwhile, vendor cost is not included as a comparator. This is because the price of a car is complex, so that it is difficult for consumers to make a comparison. Comparing the price with other consumers and dealers as well as competitor’s price may result in the perception of price (un)fairness.

(2) Consumer’s knowledge.

Perception of (un)fair price is not only due to a high price, but also because of consumer’s knowledge and understanding why it is sold at a more expensive price (Xia et al., 2004). Price information and car specifications can easily be found in common or online publications. Therefore, consumers can compare and consider the price based on their experience (Herrmann et al., 2007). Knowledge of how price is determined has a significant impact on the perceived price (Maxwell, 2002).

Consumers can evaluate whether the price being offered has a good value in accordance with what is expected and achievable. Such knowledge influences the consumers' perceptions on price fairness. Selling price plays an important role in determining whether the price or the price increase is acceptable or fair, (Bolton et al., 2003).

(3) Buyer-seller relationship.

The most important thing in the buyer-seller relationship is trust (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). There are three parts of trust, namely: (1) ability (skill and competencies), (2) benevolence, and (3) integrity (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). In the early stage of buyer-seller relationship, both parties deal with their potential benefit-promise. One will do what he says, because he is afraid of the consequences if he does not do it (calculus-based trust) (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995).

In the early stage, the most important dimension of trust is ability. Buyer-seller relationship will positively depend on the seller's skill and competences. A seller with a good competence may build early trust from the buyer (Xia et al., 2004), enhance the perception on price fairness, and alleviate the perception on price unfairness when price imbalance happens (Campbell, 1999).

Brand Image

Every product sold in the market has a brand as a differentiator between one product and the others. Brand image is subjective and perceptual. Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) suggest that brand image is largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon formed through consumer interpretations. Establishing a favorable brand image is one way to maintain positive relationships with consumers. According to Keller (1993), brand image is the perception of the brand that is reflected by the existing brand associations in consumers' memory. Futher, Cho and Fiore (2015) assert that brand must find a way to make connections with consumers.

According to Low and Lamb Jr (2000) and Esch, Langner, Schmitt, and Geus (2006), brand image consists of cognitive and emotional experiences, in line with Huang (2010) stating that brand image is what customers think, feel, and expect. Meanwhile, Cho and Fiore (2015) add a sensuality association that reflects physical involvement (i.e. sight, smell, sound and touch). This association can be perceived directly by consumers when interacting with the product. Cho and Fiore (2015) define brand image as an encapsulation of a consumer's cognitive, emotional and sensory associations related to tangible and intangible attributes and benefits resulted from direct or indirect experiences with a brand.

This study employs the concept of brand image proposed by Cho and Fiore (2015), and the opinion of Roberts and Lafley (2005) in the theory of LOVEMARKS, namely (1) mystery, (2) sensuality, and (3) intimacy. It is because this dimension has complete aspects: cognitive, affective, and sensory experience in line with this research.

(1) Cognitive association: mystery.

Cho and Fiore (2015) state that cognitive association is formed by direct and indirect interactions with the brand revealing the attributes not related to product, functional benefit and symbolic benefit. According to Cho and

Fiore (2015) and Roberts and Lafley (2005), mystery is a cognitive experience formed by past time and recent experiences with the brand, like future dream and aspiration. Cognitive definition comes from the relationship between image as a set of extrinsic attributes in the real world of a brand and image as a mental building developed by consumers (Stern, Zinkhan, & Jaju, 2001). The cognitive aspect of brand image reflects a mental experience of brand which consumers build by considering product attributes, services, performance, and symbolic or psychological meanings of a brand (Bullmore, 1984; Gensch, 1978). Roberts and Lafley (2005) include great stories, cultural myths, icon's character, and dream as the sub-components of mystery; implant inspiration and the combination of past time, now, and future. One example of automotive products is Toyota-Lexus which is able to change the image of Japanese cars in the American consumers' perception. They combine past learning and the recent dynamic condition to get the best future.

(2) Emotional association: intimacy

According to Cho and Fiore (2015), emotional association is formed by the attributes which are related to product and which are not related to perceived product through direct and indirect interactions with a brand. On the other hand, intimacy is affective. It is the bound of experience between consumers and brand, influenced by company's empathy, consumers' commitment, and consumers' desire to have or interact with the brand (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Roberts & Lafley, 2005). Other researchers (Fournier, 1998; Sternberg, 1997) explain the importance of intimacy in growing the positive emotion and perception on a couple of brands or a single brand. According to Cho and Fiore (2015), the emotional aspect of brand image refers to the brand experience that involves consumers' feeling which interacts with the brand. For example, company's understanding of consumers' opinions and preferences, consumers' long-term commitment and consumers' desire to interact with the brand can result in a positive emotion and perception on the company.

(3) Sensory association: sensuality.

According to Cho and Fiore (2015), sensory association is resulted from the direct experience with the attributes related to environment and related to product, which contributes to the experiential benefit. Meanwhile, sensuality according to Roberts and Lafley (2005) and Cho and Fiore (2015) is an exhilarating sensory experience (picture, sound, touch, smell, and/ or taste) due to the branding elements such as product design, package, appearance, and music. Gobé (2001) agrees that giving sensory experience is very important for producing positive perception on a brand.

According to Cho and Fiore (2015), the visual elements of a product, such as appearance, style, design, package, and beautiful color, music, olfactory stimulation, and various textures, strengthen the emotional experience. In the case of automotive products, the most influential for sensuality is visual element.

The Impact of Word of Mouth on Brand Image

Research conducted by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) and Gunawan, Diana, Muchardie, and Sitinjak (2016) indicates that WOM is the element of marketing mix that makes a big contribution to brand image. Such a condition is in line with the research by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) on the automotive industry in Iran which reveals that WOM has a fairly big effect on brand image. This indicates that word of mouth has a contribution to brand image. Based on the findings of previous research, we expect a positive relationship between word of mouth and brand image. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₁: Word of mouth has a positive impact on brand image.

The Impact of Price Fairness on Brand Image

There has not been much research on the impact of price fairness on brand image. Shih (2010) has studied the relationship between price strategy and brand equity (brand loyalty, brand image, and perceived quality). The empirical study indicates that high/low price strategy strengthens brand equity. This study is in line the study of Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) which demonstrates that marketing activities (such as price, slogan, symbol, packaging, corporate image, country of origin, shop's image, advertising expenditure, and promotion) have important influences on brand equity. Based on the finding of previous research, we expect the same positive relationship between price fairness and brand image in this study. Therefore, we develop the following hypothesis:

H₂: Price fairness has a positive impact on brand image

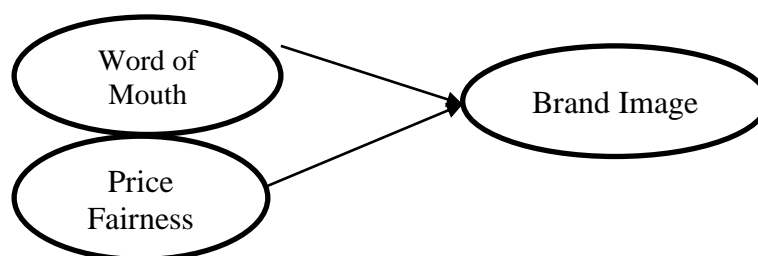


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The samples of the research include 320 buyers taken in a cluster using systematic random sampling technique. This study uses a questionnaires filled in by the buyers. The total items are 28 adopted from previous studies: Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) for word of mouth (general persuasive, general credibility and susceptibility), Xia et al. (2004) for price fairness (choice of comparison party, customer knowledge, and buyer-seller relationship), and Cho and Fiore (2015) for brand image (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy). All of the items are measured based on the participants' responses by using five-point likert scale, starting from 1 = highly disagree up to 5 = highly agree. Based on the data obtained, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were tested. Then, the research data obtained were analyzed and interpreted using inferential statistics (Structural Equation Modeling).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The selected respondents are consumers who have true intention to buy. The demographic data are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. : *Sample Characteristics*

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	168	52.4
Female	152	47.6
Age		
21 – 30 years	88	27.50
21 – 40 years	169	52.81
41 – 50 years	40	12.50
50 years or older	23	7.19
Education		
High School	92	29.0
Diploma	50	15.0
Bachelor	164	51.3
Post Graduate	15	4.7

The internal consistency of the research instrument is tested by validity and reliability analyses. The descriptive statistics, validity and reliability are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: *Validity and Construct Reliability*

Variable	Dimension	CR	VE
Word of Mouth	Persuasive	0.87	0.77
	Credibility	0.94	0.86
	Susceptibility	0.87	0.89
Price Fairness	Comparison	0.82	0.67
	Knowledge,	0.92	0.86
	Relationship	0.87	0.72
Brand Image	Mystery	0.94	0.74
	Sensuality	0.90	0.79
	Intimacy	0.96	0.85

All scales used in the study are statically reliable and valid. The result of the SEM analysis (Direct) summarized in Table 4 shows that word of mouth is significant to brand image as well as price fairness to brand image (t-value > 1.96) at 5 percent significance level.

Table 4 : *SEM Analysis*

Path	Coefficients	T-Value	Result
H ₁ : Word of Mouth → Brand Image	0.28	6.96	H ₁ : Accepted
H ₂ : Price Fairness → Brand Image	0.65	15.42	H ₂ : Accepted

The findings of this research indicate that price fairness has a significant influence and gives positive contribution (0.65) in building brand image. The ability of consumers to compare prices will make them feel that the price which they pay is fair, as well as the close relationship between seller and buyer which can improve the brand image. Likewise, word of mouth, as

a credible information source, has a significant positive influence (0.28) on brand image. The lower influence of word of mouth compared to that of price fairness on brand image is due to the inadequate information from dealers concerning the fuel efficiency of green car products. In addition, green car is regarded as a complex product which is sensitive with price. Therefore the buyers' closeness and trust on the offered price are necessary for building brand image.

CONCLUSIONS

This research analyzes the influence of word of mouth and price fairness on the brand image of green car in Indonesia, involving 320 buyers of Toyota Agya in Jakarta Province, Indonesia. The results of this research provide empirical evidence of the impact of word of mouth and price fairness on the development brand image of green cars in Indonesia. The contribution of word of mouth in building brand image is smaller compared that of price fairness. This condition is caused by the less-active involvement of dealers in communicating the fuel consumption of the green cars. If consumers feel that the price offered is fair, they will always remember the brand. So, price fairness has a significant positive effect on brand image.

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