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Bridging Quality to Buying Action: The Mediating Mechanism of Price Perception in Consumer Footwear Purchases

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the direct effects of product quality and price on purchase decisions among footwear consumers in Bandung, while examining the mediating role of price in bridging product quality to actual buying decisions. Employing a quantitative explanatory survey design, this research gathered empirical data from 100 consumers who purchased specific brand shoes in Bandung via purposive sampling. The data were evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), encompassing convergent and discriminant validity, reliability assessments, structural path bootstrapping, as well as predictive metrics including PLSpredict and CVPAT. The measurement model confirmed robust convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability without multicollinearity issues. The structural assessment revealed that product quality significantly drives price perception (beta = 0.851), while both product quality (beta = 0.487) and price (beta = 0.480) positively determine purchase decisions (R2 = 86.6%). Crucially, price acts as a significant complementary partial mediator (beta = 0.409, p < 0.001), with strong out-of-sample predictive capability confirmed by PLSpredict (Q2predict > 0.70) and negative CVPAT average loss differences. Theoretically, these results enrich consumer behavior literature by validating price as an active value-transmitting mediator rather than merely a monetary sacrifice. Practically, footwear marketers must prioritize core material craftsmanship and adopt value-based pricing strategies, ensuring marketing communications transparently articulate functional superiority to justify the price point and stimulate purchases. This study advances conventional consumer research by establishing an integrated structural mediation model that treats price perception as an empirical bridge between quality and purchase action in an urban footwear market, strengthened by contemporary out-of-sample PLS predictive validation (PLSpredict and CVPAT).

Keywords: Product Quality, Price Perception, Purchase Decision, Mediation Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid expansion in the creative sector and shifting urban lifestyle dynamics drive intense competition across Indonesia's footwear market, centered notably in Bandung as a national

fashion benchmark. Today's urban consumers evaluate footwear through an increasingly critical lens, looking past visual aesthetics to demand high material reliability, ergonomic comfort, and structural durability (Costanzo et al., 2026; Firtikiadis et al., 2024). This heightened scrutiny reflects broader shifts in consumer decision-making, where functional attributes and material sustainability heavily govern purchase choices (Papamichael et al., 2024; Yadav et al., 2024). As local and global brands flood the market, footwear enterprises must steadily refine product quality to capture consumer interest and preserve their market standing (Juárez-Varón et al., 2023).

Even though product quality lays the foundation of a brand's proposition, price still serves as a decisive filter that determines final transaction behavior. Buyers systematically balance monetary sacrifice against promised functional utility and emotional satisfaction, carefully judging whether cost aligns with actual product worth (Büyükdağ et al., 2020; Feuß et al., 2022). When superior quality exceeds initial expectations, consumers view the price as reasonable and justified, which effectively streamlines the path to a purchase decision. Driven by this tension between functional utility and financial commitment, this study investigates how product quality and price perception interact to drive footwear purchase decisions among consumers in Bandung.

Scholars have long recognized product quality and price as primary drivers of consumer purchase decisions (Das Guru & Paulssen, 2020). Despite this established foundation, earlier studies typically restrict the concept of price to a mere monetary sacrifice that deters buyers, or they treat it as an independent factor functioning separately from product quality (Kim et al., 2024). This conventional approach generates persistent empirical inconsistencies. For instance, while some data indicates that high costs suppress purchase intent, alternative studies reveal that premium pricing actively attracts consumers by serving as a reliable quality signal, a phenomenon known as the price-quality heuristic (Xu et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2022).

Consequently, a significant research gap exists because very few empirical studies position price perception as an active mediating variable. Literature currently lacks a comprehensive look at how price acts as a psychological mechanism that translates perceived functional quality into a concrete value assessment right before the consumer finalizes a

transaction. Exploring this active mediation is especially crucial within the highly competitive domestic footwear industry—a dynamic market where fashion involvement, digital sales drivers, and emotional brand interactions continuously reshape how buyers evaluate products (Alanadoly & Salem, 2022; Hossain et al., 2024; Shukla & Misra, 2021).

Beyond these conceptual limitations, distinct contextual and methodological gaps warrant deeper investigation. The rapid expansion of the footwear industry in urban hubs like Bandung fosters increasingly critical consumer behavior, where purchase decisions no longer stem from a single variable, but rather emerge from a deliberate, rational trade-off between material quality and price affordability. Moreover, prior studies frequently rely on traditional multiple regression techniques that fail to evaluate simultaneous indirect pathways and overlook out-of-sample predictive power. Consequently, deploying advanced Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)—supplemented by predictive evaluation tools like PLSpredict and the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT)—becomes essential to bridge these analytical shortcomings.

To address these research gaps, this study investigates whether product quality directly and significantly impacts price perception and footwear purchase decisions among consumers in Bandung. Furthermore, it examines how price perception directly shapes buying decisions and whether it serves as a key mediating mechanism that transmits the effects of product quality onto ultimate purchasing behavior. Resolving these interconnected inquiries provides essential theoretical clarity regarding the value-transmission function of price while delivering practical, actionable managerial guidance for footwear manufacturers navigating competitive retail landscapes.

METHOD

This study applies a quantitative explanatory survey design to empirically test the proposed causal relationships among the specified variables. We gathered primary data directly from target respondents through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. The target population comprises consumers in Bandung who have purchased and worn a specific brand of footwear. Utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling technique, we selected a sample of 100 qualifying respondents who met defined criteria, specifically residing in Bandung and completing a purchase transaction within a designated timeframe.

The research operationalizes three core constructs: Product Quality and Price as exogenous variables, and Purchase Decision as the endogenous variable, with Price simultaneously operating as a key mediating mechanism. A set of reflective indicators measures each construct, capturing functional performance, value alignment, price affordability, and the stages of consumer purchasing behavior. Prior to structural estimation, we subjected the survey instrument to a preliminary verification process to refine wording and optimize item readability, ensuring respondents could provide clear, accurate, and objective evaluations.

To evaluate empirical data and test hypotheses, the study employs variance-based Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). We execute data assessment across two primary stages: measurement model (outer model) verification and structural model (inner model) evaluation. The measurement model assessment confirms convergent validity (outer loadings and AVE), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), discriminant validity via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and multicollinearity levels using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Subsequently, we evaluate the structural model and test hypothesis significance through a bootstrapping procedure, examining coefficients of determination (R2), effect sizes (f2), predictive capabilities via PLSpredict and CVPAT, and both direct and specific indirect mediation effects at a 5% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical testing confirms that all indicator items validly measure their respective constructs across the Product Quality, Price, and Purchase Decision variables. Outer loadings range from 0.532 to 0.872 for the six Product Quality items, 0.622 to 0.837 for the nine Price items, and 0.537 to 0.828 for the eight Purchase Decision items. Because every coefficient surpasses the standard 0.50 convergent validity threshold, we retained all survey items for structural analysis. Furthermore, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values—0.531 for Product Quality, 0.552 for Price, and 0.500 for Purchase Decision—consistently meet the minimum 0.50 benchmark, proving that these latent constructs account for the majority of variance across their underlying indicators.

Tabel 1. Validity and Reliability Test

	Product Quality	Price	Purchase	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ProdQ1	0.532			1.654		
ProdQ2	0.774			1.955		
ProdQ3	0.615			1.582	0.815	0.531
ProdQ4	0.710			1.683		
ProdQ5	0.812			1.952		
ProdQ6	0.872			2.892		
Pri1		0.737		2.436		
Pri2		0.636		1.967		
Pri3		0.749		2.128		
Pri4		0.837		2.821		
Pri5		0.622		1.634	0.897	0.552
Pri6		0.728		2.484		
Pri7		0.779		2.246		
Pri8		0.823		2.500		
Pri9		0.747		1.968		
Purch1			0.537	1.587		
Purch2			0.630	1.906		
Purch3			0.744	1.971		
Purch4			0.577	2.143	0.855	0.500
Purch5			0.761	2.325		
Purch6			0.701	2.184		
Purch7			0.821	2.531		
Purch8			0.828	2.848		

Reliability evaluations demonstrate exceptionally strong internal consistency across all three variables. Price achieved the highest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient at 0.897, followed by Purchase Decision at 0.855 and Product Quality at 0.815—values that comfortably surpass the standard 0.70 threshold. Additionally, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) calculations at the indicator level yielded a range between 1.582 and 2.892. Because no VIF score exceeded the conservative threshold of 3.3 (or the broader cutoff of 5.0), the survey instrument remains entirely free from indicator-level multicollinearity. Consequently, the measurement model fulfills every validity and reliability prerequisite necessary to proceed with structural hypothesis testing.

Tabel 2. HTMT, R2, f2, PLSpredict, CVPAT

HTMT	**Price**	**Product Quality**	**Purchase**
Price			
Product Quality	0.823		
Purchase	0.902	0.849	
	R2		
Price	0.725		
Purchase	0.866		
	F2		
Price -> Purchase	0.473		
Product Quality -> Price	2.630		
Product Quality -> Purchase	0.486		
PLSpredict	**Q^2predict**	**RMSE**	**MAE**
Price	0.709	0.558	0.421
Purchase	0.780	0.486	0.321
CPVAT	**PLS loss**	**IA loss**	**Average loss difference**
Price	0.432	0.699	-0.267
Purchase	0.498	0.806	-0.308
Overall	0.463	0.749	-0.286

Discriminant validity evaluation via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio produced values of 0.823 between Price and Product Quality, and 0.849 between Product Quality and Purchase Decision, both staying within the conservative 0.85 threshold. The HTMT value between Price and Purchase Decision stood at 0.902, which remains acceptable under the liberal 0.90–0.95 cutoff for conceptually related constructs. Structural model evaluations demonstrated substantial explanatory power, yielding R2 values of 0.725 for Price and 0.866 for Purchase Decision. Effect size (f2) assessments revealed that Product Quality exerts an exceptionally large impact on Price (f2 = 2.630), while Price (f2 = 0.473) and Product Quality (f2 = 0.486) both exert strong direct effects on Purchase Decision (f2 > 0.35).

We assessed the predictive performance of the model using PLSpredict and the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT). PLSpredict generated high, positive Q2_predict scores for Price (0.709) and Purchase Decision (0.780), alongside low estimation errors (RMSE 0.558 and MAE 0.421 for Price; RMSE 0.486 and MAE 0.321 for Purchase Decision), confirming strong out-of-sample predictive power. CVPAT results corroborated these findings, showing that PLS loss consistently undercut Indicator Average (IA) loss for Price (0.432 vs. 0.699), Purchase Decision (0.498 vs. 0.806), and Overall metrics (0.463 vs. 0.749). Negative average loss differences across all dimensions—including an overall score

of -0.286—empirically demonstrate that the structural PLS model yields significantly higher predictive accuracy than simple baseline indicators.

Table 3. Path, CI and Hypotheses

Path Total Effect	**Coefficients**	**Bias**	**CI 5%**	**CI 95%**	**P value**	**Hypotheses**
Price -> Purchase	0.480	-0.015	0.321	0.623	0.000	Accepted
Product Quality -> Price	0.851	0.006	0.785	0.889	0.000	Accepted
Product Quality -> Purchase	0.487	0.017	0.334	0.641	0.000	Accepted
Total Indirect Effect						
Product Quality -> Purchase	0.409	-0.010	0.276	0.532	0.000	Accepted
Specific indirect effect						
Product Quality -> Price -> Purchase	0.409	-0.010	0.276	0.532	0.000	Accepted

Direct effect testing confirms that all proposed hypotheses are statistically significant at the 5% level. Product Quality exerts the strongest positive direct effect on Price, yielding a path coefficient of 0.851 (p = 0.000) and a 5%–95% confidence interval (CI) ranging from 0.785 to 0.889. Regarding Purchase Decision, both Product Quality and Price demonstrate significant positive influences, producing path coefficients of 0.487 (p = 0.000; CI: 0.334–0.641) and 0.480 (p = 0.000; CI: 0.321–0.623), respectively. Because none of the confidence intervals across these direct pathways cross zero and estimation bias remains minimal (-0.015 to 0.017), the empirical results confirm the structural stability and strength of these causal relationships.

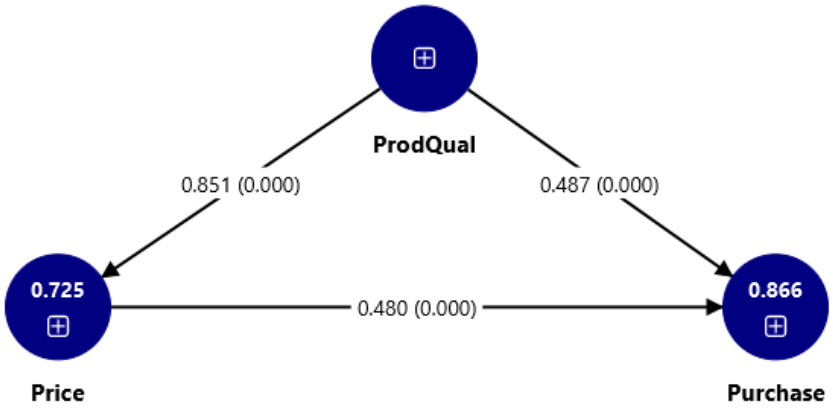


Figure 1. Mediation Analysis Result

Mediation analysis reveals that Price significantly mediates the relationship between Product Quality and Purchase Decision. The total and specific indirect effects along the Product Quality → Price → Purchase Decision pathway both produced an identical coefficient of 0.409 (p = 0.000). A positive confidence interval ranging from 0.276 to 0.532 (strictly excluding zero) provides convincing support for the mediation hypothesis. Because both the direct effect (Product Quality on Purchase Decision) and the indirect pathway remain positive and statistically significant, Price operates as a complementary partial mediator in this structural model.

Statistical analysis confirms that all tested direct and indirect pathways exert positive and significant impacts, with confidence intervals strictly excluding zero. The data empirically supports the direct effect of product quality on price, alongside the direct influence of both quality and price on purchase behavior. These findings parallel recent evidence indicating that tangible product attributes, design trends, and sustainability features fundamentally shape consumer decision-making and perceived value (Firtikiadis et al., 2024; Juárez-Varón et al., 2023; Yadav et al., 2024).

Price also functions as a critical mediating variable between product quality and actual purchase. The emergence of a complementary partial mediation indicates that superior product features do more than just independently drive sales. Instead, high-quality offerings actively shape the consumer's perception of price fairness before triggering the final action. When consumers recognize strong product attributes, they develop a higher tolerance and justification for the cost, which reinforces their perceived value of the item (Gonçalves et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2022). Ultimately, establishing this pricing attractiveness and pragmatic

value acts as a vital bridge that transforms initial product interest into a concrete purchase decision (Curth et al., 2026; Rai & Bhattarai, 2023).

Price perception mediates the relationship between product quality and purchase decisions through a systematic sequence of cognitive and value-evaluation stages.

Stimulus and Physical Quality Perception, the process begins when consumers evaluate a shoe's physical and functional attributes. Specific quality indicators—such as upper material durability, sole cushioning, precision stitching, and ergonomic fit—serve as the primary stimulus. Rather than viewing footwear as basic apparel, consumers interpret these tangible attributes as explicit signals of reliability, high performance, and long-term utility. The cognitive chain initiates when consumers encounter and inspect tangible footwear attributes—specifically upper material grade, outsole traction, midsole cushioning responsiveness, stitching precision, and anatomical ergonomics. Under the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) paradigm, these physical cues are not processed merely as passive aesthetic features, but are encoded as diagnostic signals of long-term structural reliability and wearing comfort. In Bandung's discerning footwear market, where buyers compare local craftsmanship against global brands, tangible build quality establishes an initial cognitive anchor of functional superiority.

Cognitive Transformation into Price Evaluation, superior product quality fundamentally shifts how consumers evaluate cost, a pattern reflected empirically by the dominant path coefficient. Rather than viewing the price tag strictly as a financial loss, buyers interpret it as a reflection of price fairness and value alignment. High functional quality activates the price-quality heuristic, leading consumers to perceive the asking price as rational, appropriate, and fully justified. Once functional superiority is internalized, consumers shift from attribute inspection to monetary appraisal—a transition empirically captured by the massive path coefficient from Product Quality to Price (beta = 0.851, f2 = 2.630). Rather than evaluating the listed price in isolation as a painful financial outlay, buyers invoke an internal reference price benchmarked against the perceived quality tier. High craftsmanship triggers an inverse price-quality inference: consumers judge that superior materials inherently warrant a commensurate price point. Consequently, the psychological framing of price transforms from a perceived economic barrier into a legitimate, fair, and transparent reflection of product worth.

Net Benefit Assessment and Risk Reduction, at this mediating juncture, a positive price perception actively reduces perceived purchase risk. Drawing on transaction utility theory, consumers perform a mental calculation that weighs functional benefits against financial outlay. When quality justifies cost, buyers recognize a compelling deal, establishing a critical psychological bridge that converts product appreciation into an explicit willingness to pay. Buyers weigh the anticipated stream of functional utility (durability, daily comfort, and longevity) and symbolic value against the required monetary sacrifice. When perceived price fairness is high, the net perceived value (acquisition utility plus transaction utility) turns decisively positive. Simultaneously, this positive value alignment suppresses financial and functional performance risks—reassuring the buyer that the footwear will not prematurely degrade or cause discomfort, thereby eliminating the cognitive friction and hesitation that typically stall retail purchases.

Action and Transaction Conversion, this favorable price evaluation ultimately drives consumers to finalize their purchase decisions. Operating through a complementary partial mediation mechanism, product quality directly stimulates buying intent while indirectly strengthening that impulse through price value justification. Affirming that the price is fair and worthwhile secures buyer commitment, turning purchase intentions into actual retail transactions across both physical and digital platforms.

Strengthening Consumer Behavior Models, these empirical results enrich marketing literature by establishing product quality and price as primary predictors of purchase decisions. Confirmation of Complementary Mediation, the study provides empirical proof of a complementary partial mediation mechanism, confirming that price acts as an active value mediator. Rather than serving merely as a financial sacrifice, price perception directly translates functional product excellence into concrete purchase actions. Advanced predictive assessments (PLSpredict and CVPAT) offer strong methodological validation, confirming that the three-construct structural model yields stable out-of-sample predictive accuracy and robust generalizability. Prioritizing Product Quality Investments, the substantial impact of product quality on price perception underscores the need for management to prioritize material durability, craftsmanship, and overall performance. Superior quality builds the essential foundation that leads consumers to view price points as fair, reasonable, and fully justified. Because price positively mediates final purchases, firms should avoid ruinous price

wars. Management should instead adopt value-based pricing, using marketing communications to highlight unique specification features so consumers perceive the price as a fair trade-off for the value received. The balanced direct effects of quality and price on buying choices demand that marketers continuously align product expectations with pricing realities, consistently driving transaction conversions across retail channels.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that product quality and price exert direct, positive, and significant influences on footwear purchase decisions in Bandung, accounting for 86.6% of the variance in the model. Empirically, price operates as a complementary partial mediator, actively reinforcing the pathway through which superior product quality translates into final purchase actions. From a practical standpoint, these insights advise footwear brand managers to focus on material durability and quality innovation while implementing value-based pricing strategies, ensuring that consumers consistently perceive listed prices as fair trades for functional utility.

Primary limitations stem from a geographic scope restricted to Bandung, a sample size of 100 respondents, and a cross-sectional design that records consumer sentiment at a single moment in time. Future studies should broaden geographic coverage across multiple cities and expand sample sizes to improve generalizability. Researchers should also consider integrating additional drivers—such as brand image, digital marketing, or customer satisfaction—while adopting longitudinal methods to monitor long-term shifts in buyer behavior.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The authors transparently disclose the use of AI Tool exclusively for the purpose of linguistic editing and grammatical refinement of the original draft. The authors maintain full responsibility for the manuscript's substantive content, data integrity, and final scientific conclusions.

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