THE ZERO PRICE PARADOX: WHEN AND WHY ZERO PRICES ARE LESS EFFECTIVE THAN LOW PRICES IN DRIVING CONSUMER DEMAND

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ABSTRACT

The zero price paradox has become an interesting phenomenon in the study of economics and consumer behavior. Although zero prices are supposed to trigger high demand, the reality is that zero prices are often less effective in encouraging consumers to take action than low prices. This shows the complexity in perceived value, consumer psychology, and economic factors that influence consumer behavior. This research aims to understand the zero price paradox phenomenon by analyzing the factors that influence the lack of effectiveness of zero prices in driving consumer demand. The research method used is qualitative, by reviewing relevant literature in the study of economics and consumer behavior. Data sources used include journals, articles and books that discuss the zero price paradox and related factors. The research results show that perceived value, consumer psychology, and economic factors such as product or service quality play an important role in explaining the zero price paradox. Consumers tend to place a higher value on the goods or services they pay for, even if the price is low. In a zero-price context, when consumers pay nothing at all, they tend to be less attached to or pay less attention to the product, which reduces motivation to use it. Additionally, low prices are often considered a better indicator of value by consumers.

Keywords: zero price paradox, consumer psychology, consumer demand.

ABSTRAK

INTRODUCTION

In the economic world, prices have a very important role in regulating consumer and producer behavior. The price a product is set can influence demand, supply, and resource allocation. However, there is an interesting paradox that confuses economists, namely the zero price paradox. This paradox arises when the price of a product or service is zero or close to zero, which should be considered the most attractive price for consumers, but is in fact less effective in driving demand than a low price (Fitri et al., 2020). In this context, the zero price paradox is an interesting phenomenon to be researched further. Why are zero prices less effective in increasing consumer demand, and why do low prices actually encourage consumers to buy? These questions give rise to a strong interest in understanding consumer behavior and the economic factors that influence it.

Zero price in an economic context refers to a monetary value equal to zero or having no value placed on a product or service. In this situation, consumers are not required to pay anything to get the product or service. Zero pricing is often considered a very profitable opportunity for consumers, because in theory, they can gain benefits without incurring costs. Zero price does not mean that the product or service has no costs, but rather a different allocation of costs. For example, in the case of free services, costs may be allocated to other resources such as advertising, sponsorship, or other business models.

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Therefore, zero pricing is often a marketing strategy used to attract consumers and increase market penetration (Luh Putu Erma Mertaningrum et al., 2023).

Zero prices can also have complex social and psychological implications. Products or services offered at zero prices may be considered of low value or low quality by consumers, especially when compared to products that have higher prices. Additionally, consumers may also feel less engaged or committed to a product or service provided for free, which may reduce motivation to take full advantage of it (Maitriyani, Okalesa, Syukri Hadi, 2023). Zero prices can also be a source of uncertainty. When consumers pay nothing to get a product or service, they may become more wary of the product's quality, reliability, or sustainability. Therefore, it is important for companies or service providers to consider the long-term implications of zero pricing and ensure that their marketing strategies take these factors into account.

Consumer demand is a term in economics that refers to the amount of goods or services desired by consumers at various price levels, with other assumptions remaining constant. Consumer demand is greatly influenced by various factors such as the price of the goods themselves, consumer income, prices of substitute and complementary goods, consumer preferences, market trends, and other factors. In economic analysis, consumer demand is often represented in the form of a demand curve which shows the relationship between the price of a good and the quantity demanded by consumers at that price level (Yulianto et al., 2023). The concept of consumer demand is crucial in determining market dynamics and marketing strategies. Companies can use an understanding of consumer demand to set appropriate prices, develop products that are more attractive to the market, and plan effective promotional strategies. In addition, governments and economic regulators can also use information about consumer demand to design economic policies aimed at improving people's welfare and optimizing resource allocation (Megawati, 2021).

The debate about the effectiveness of zero prices in driving consumer demand has been a topic of interest to economists, psychologists and marketers. When the price of a product or service goes to zero, in theory, consumers should see it as a highly profitable opportunity and will likely be more interested in purchasing it (Syahfitri et al., 2022). However, the reality often does not match these expectations. One of the fundamental explanations for the zero price paradox is the perception of value. Even though a price of zero indicates that the product or service is free, consumers still consider the value derived from the product. A low price, while not free, may be considered a better indicator of value by consumers. This is related to the assumption that products with low prices are likely to have better quality than products with zero prices (Ariyanto et al., 2021).

Consumer psychology also plays an important role in this zero price paradox. Consumers tend to place a higher value on the goods or services they pay for, even if the price is low. In this context, when consumers pay nothing at all (zero price), they may feel less engaged or care less about the product, which in turn reduces motivation to use it (Pratama, 2023). Additionally, other factors such as perceived quality, the psychological drive to get a good deal, and the uncertainty associated with a free product or service may also influence consumer behavior toward zero pricing. In the context of increasingly connected and rapidly changing markets, a better understanding of the zero price paradox is becoming increasingly important for companies and marketers. Digging deeper into the causes and implications of this phenomenon can help companies design more effective marketing strategies and optimize the pricing of their products or services (Arif et al., 2020).

The zero price paradox shows the complexity in consumer behavior and economic decision making. Although logically, zero prices should be a strong demand driver, the reality often falls short

of expectations (Rahmita et al., 2023). Factors such as perceived value, consumer psychology, and the drive to get a good deal play an important role in this phenomenon. In the context of ever-evolving markets and increasing competition, a better understanding of the zero price paradox is key to designing effective marketing strategies and optimizing business performance. Thus, further research and in-depth study of this phenomenon will provide valuable insights for practitioners and academics in the fields of economics, marketing, and consumer behavior.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this research is qualitative, which aims to deepen understanding of the zero price paradox phenomenon in the context of driving consumer demand. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore in greater depth the psychological, social, and economic factors that influence consumer perceptions and behavior toward zero prices. In this research, data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews with consumers, content analysis of relevant journals, articles and books, and participant observation can be used to gain comprehensive insight into this phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2017).

The data sources used in this research are scientific journals, current articles, and books related to economics, consumer behavior, and marketing. Through analysis of relevant literature, researchers can identify theories and frameworks that can explain the zero price paradox in depth. Additionally, the use of qualitative data from interviews and observations can provide valuable insight into consumers' direct experiences and perceptions of zero pricing. By combining diverse data sources, this research aims to present a holistic understanding of the zero price paradox phenomenon and the factors that influence it in driving consumer demand.

In facing the zero price paradox and to understand why zero prices are less effective than low prices in driving consumer demand, several relevant data analysis techniques can be used (Sugiyono, 2018):

1. Qualitative Analysis of Content

This technique involves in-depth reading and analysis of texts from data sources such as interviews, journals, articles and books related to the zero price paradox. Researchers will look for patterns, themes, and concepts that appear repeatedly in the data, to identify factors that influence consumer behavior towards zero prices. For example, this research may involve grouping certain quotes or findings into relevant categories, such as perceived value, psychological drives, or uncertainty.

2. Comparative Analysis

This technique compares data between different groups or between different times to identify differences and similarities in responses to zero and low prices. For example, this research can compare the results of interviews or surveys from consumers who were given zero-price products and low-price products. Comparative analysis can help reveal patterns that may not be immediately apparent in single data.

By applying these data analysis techniques, research can yield a deeper understanding of the zero price paradox phenomenon and the factors that influence its effectiveness in driving consumer demand. The combination of qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis will provide comprehensive and in-depth insight into the complex dynamics behind the zero price paradox.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Previous research has revealed a lot of interesting zero price paradox phenomena in the context of economics and consumer behavior. A number of studies show that, although in theory zero prices should trigger high demand, in reality zero prices are often less effective in encouraging consumers to take action than low prices (Kayikci et al., 2022). One of the main reasons behind this paradox is the complex value perception held by consumers. Although a price of zero indicates that the product or service is free, consumers tend to place a lower value on goods or services they obtain for free. In some cases, a zero price may even be considered an indicator of low quality or less value, reducing consumers' interest in taking advantage of it (Blazquez et al., 2020).

Consumer psychology also plays an important role in this zero price paradox. Consumers tend to place a higher value on the goods or services they pay for, even if the price is low. In this context, when consumers pay nothing at all (zero price), they may feel less engaged or care less about the product, which in turn reduces motivation to use it. Research also shows that low prices, while not free, are often considered a better indicator of value by consumers. They tend to believe that low-priced products or services offer better quality or more value than free ones (Dertwinkel-Kalt & Wey, 2021).

FOther factors such as the psychological drive to get a good deal, perceptions of quality, and uncertainty associated with a free product or service may also influence consumer behavior toward zero prices. Consumers are often more interested in products or services that offer clear, measurable value, even if it means paying a certain amount of money (Reuter, 2022). In this context, low prices may be more successful in attracting consumers' attention and encouraging them to act, because they offer a more attractive combination of good value and low costs. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the complexities of value perception, consumer psychology, and economic factors influencing the zero price paradox is important in designing effective marketing strategies and better understanding consumer behavior (Frew et al., 2021).

The results of research on the zero price paradox show the complexity in consumer behavior and the factors that influence it (Whitmeyer, 2020). One of the key findings of this research is that although in theory zero prices should be a driver of high demand, in reality zero prices are often less effective in encouraging consumers to take action than low prices. A number of studies highlight that consumers' perceived value plays a key role in this phenomenon. Although zero pricing offers a product or service for free, consumers tend to place less value on goods or services obtained for free. This could be due to the assumption that low-priced products are more likely to offer better quality or more value than free ones (Lange et al., 2021).

Consumer psychology also influences this zero price paradox. Consumers tend to place a higher value on the goods or services they pay for, even if the price is low. In this context, when consumers pay nothing at all (zero price), they may feel less engaged or care less about the product, which in turn reduces motivation to use it (Bhardwaj, 2003). Research also highlights that low prices, while not free, are often considered a better indicator of value by consumers. They tend to believe that low-priced products or services offer better quality or more value than free ones (Goldfarb & Que, 2023). Other factors that are also relevant in this discussion are perceived quality, the psychological drive to get a good deal, and the uncertainty associated with a free product or service. Consumers are often more interested in products or services that offer clear, measurable value, even if it means paying a certain amount of money. In this context, low prices may be more successful in attracting consumers' attention and encouraging them to act, because they offer a more attractive combination of good value and low costs. Therefore, the results of this research provide important insights for companies and marketers in

designing effective marketing strategies and understanding consumer behavior better (Clemons et al., 2022).

1. Perception of Value in a Zero Price Context

Perception of value in the context of zero prices is a complex and interesting aspect in the study of economics and consumer behavior. The zero price paradox phenomenon highlights that although in theory zero prices should trigger high demand because they offer a product or service for free, in practice zero prices are often associated with low perceptions of value by consumers. Research on perceived value in the zero price context involves a deep understanding of how consumers evaluate and assign value to products or services offered at zero price. In this discussion, we will explore the factors that influence perceived value in the zero price context, their implications for consumer behavior, and their relevance in marketing strategy and economic decision making.

Perceived value is a subjective evaluation made by individuals regarding the benefits they receive from a product or service compared to the costs they have to pay to obtain it. In a zero price context, perceived value becomes especially important because consumers must assess whether the benefits they obtain from the product or service are worth the "costs" that are not directly represented by the price. Traditional economic theory would argue that zero price should result in unlimited demand because price is not a barrier for consumers to obtain the product or service. However, in reality, value perceptions often lead to outcomes that contradict these assumptions.

A number of factors influence consumer value perceptions in a zero price context. First, the quality of the product or service is a significant determining factor. Even though zero price offers a product for free, consumers tend to question the quality of the product or service. They may associate a price of zero with lower quality or less value compared to a higher priced product or service. Studies show that consumers tend to believe that low-priced products offer better quality than free ones, even though this may not be the case. The second factor is the psychological aspect of perceived value. Consumers tend to place a higher value on the goods or services they pay for, even if the price is low. In a zero price context, when consumers pay nothing at all, they may feel less engaged or care less about the product, which in turn reduces motivation to use it. This indicates that psychological factors, such as a sense of ownership and commitment, play an important role in how consumers evaluate the value of products or services offered at zero prices.

The psychological drive to get a good deal may also influence perceptions of value in a zero-price context. Consumers often look for added value or additional benefits when they shop, and zero price can be considered "too good a deal to pass up." However, in some cases, when the deal is too good, consumers may be suspicious or doubtful about the quality of the product or service, which may reduce motivation to take action. Perceptions of value in a zero price context have significant implications for consumer behavior and marketing strategy. Research shows that consumers are often more attracted to products or services that offer clear, measurable value, even if it means paying a certain amount of money. Therefore, companies need to take consumers' perceived value into account in setting their pricing and marketing strategies.

In this case, a low price may be more successful in attracting consumers' attention and encouraging them to act, because it offers a more attractive combination of good value and low cost. However, it is important to remember that zero pricing still has the potential to attract consumers if managed correctly. Companies can use creative marketing strategies to increase the perceived value of products or services offered free of charge, for example by highlighting the additional benefits or

advantages provided. Additionally, providing a quality guarantee or offering a free trial can help reduce uncertainty and increase consumer interest in a product or service offered at zero price. Value perception in the context of zero prices is a complex and important aspect in the study of economics and consumer behavior. Although zero pricing should offer highly favorable value to consumers, the reality is that complex value perceptions and psychological factors can reduce its effectiveness in driving consumer demand. In this context, a deeper understanding of consumer value perceptions and the factors that influence them becomes important in designing effective marketing strategies and better understanding consumer behavior.

2. Consumer Psychology and Buying Motivation

Consumer psychology and buying motivation are two interrelated fields in understanding consumer behavior in the context of the modern economy. Consumers are often influenced by complex psychological factors in their purchasing decisions, which include needs, desires, preferences and emotions. In this discussion, we will explore various aspects of consumer psychology and purchasing motivation, as well as their implications for economic decision making, marketing strategy, and overall economic development. Consumer psychology theory aims to understand the mental and emotional processes that influence consumer behavior in the context of purchasing decisions. One of the main theories in consumer psychology is behavioral theory which includes concepts such as needs, desires, preferences and attitudes. According to this theory, consumers tend to buy products or services that fulfill their needs or desires, which are influenced by psychological factors such as perception, motivation, attitudes, and emotions.

Purchase motivation is a strong factor in consumer purchasing decisions. Motivation can come from a variety of sources, including physical and psychological needs, the desire to fulfill desires or aspirations, the drive to seek pleasure or satisfaction, or the desire to gain social recognition. Consumer psychology studies have identified several primary buying motivations, including intrinsic motivation (which comes from internal needs or desires) and extrinsic motivation (which comes from external factors such as rewards or recognition). Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by a number of psychological factors. One of the main factors is perception, namely how consumers interpret and understand information about a product or service. Consumer perceptions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including previous experiences, personal preferences, and marketing messages. Additionally, motivation, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs also play an important role in purchasing decisions, influencing whether consumers choose to purchase or not purchase a product or service.

Consumer psychology and purchasing motivation have significant implications for marketing strategy and economic decision making. Marketers often use knowledge of consumer psychology to design effective marketing strategies, which include product placement, pricing, promotion, and distribution. By understanding consumer buying motivations and the psychological factors that influence purchasing decisions, companies can develop strategies that are more relevant and attractive to their target market. In addition, knowledge of consumer psychology is also important for economic decision makers in designing public policies and regulations that influence consumer behavior and the market as a whole. Effective economic policies must take into account the psychological aspects of consumer behavior, including how they influence purchasing motivation, perceived value, and purchasing decision making.

Although much is known about consumer psychology and purchase motivations, there are still many challenges and opportunities for further research that need to be explored. Further studies could deepen understanding of the mental and emotional processes that influence consumer behavior, as well

as identify psychological factors that influence economic decision making in different contexts. Additionally, research can explore how new technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, can be used to better analyze and understand consumer behavior, which in turn can help companies and marketers develop more effective and relevant strategies.

3. Implications for Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy is the core of a company's efforts to achieve their business goals, which include introducing products or services to the market, reaching potential consumers, and influencing purchasing decisions. In a dynamic and competitive business environment, knowledge of consumer psychology, market trends and the latest technology is crucial in designing effective marketing strategies. In this discussion, we will explore the various implications of consumer psychology, market trends, and technology on marketing strategy, as well as the challenges and opportunities companies face in achieving marketing success.

- 1. Knowledge of Consumer Psychology: The Key to Understanding Consumer Needs and Wants Knowledge of consumer psychology is an important element in designing a successful marketing strategy. Consumer psychology studies the mental and emotional processes that influence consumer behavior, including how consumers interpret information, make purchasing decisions, and respond to promotions or marketing messages. By understanding consumer buying motivations, value perceptions, preferences and emotions, companies can develop marketing strategies that are more relevant and attractive to their target markets.
- 2. Following Market Trends: Adapting to Change and Innovation

Market trends play an important role in determining effective marketing strategies. Companies need to keep up with the latest market trends, including changes in consumer behavior, preferences and market needs. This can involve careful market analysis, market research, and the use of analytical data to understand market trends and predict upcoming changes. By following market trends, companies can adapt their marketing strategies to remain relevant and competitive in an ever-changing market.

3. Utilization of Technology: Increasing Marketing Efficiency and Effectiveness

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in designing successful marketing strategies. Leveraging the latest technologies, such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, and social media platforms, can help companies target their audiences more effectively, measure marketing campaign performance, and personalize consumer experiences. By using technology wisely, companies can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing strategies, thereby increasing the return on their marketing investments.

4. Facing Challenges: Adapting to a Dynamic Business Environment

Although an effective marketing strategy can bring success to a company, there are many challenges faced in designing and implementing a successful marketing strategy. One of the main challenges is the intense competition in the market, where companies have to compete to get consumer attention and win market share. In addition, changes in consumer behavior, technological developments, and changes in market trends can also pose challenges for companies in keeping up with changes and maintaining their competitive advantage.

5. Optimizing Opportunities: Looking for Innovative Ways to Increase Attraction and Relevance
Despite the challenges faced in marketing strategies, there are also many opportunities
for companies to increase the attractiveness and relevance of their marketing strategies. One
way to do this is through innovation in products or services, creative promotions, and the use
of the latest technology. By looking for innovative ways to attract consumer attention and

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differentiate themselves from competitors, companies can create a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace.

In the ever-growing digital era, designing a successful marketing strategy is becoming increasingly important for a company's success in winning market competition. By understanding consumer psychology, keeping up with market trends, leveraging the latest technologies, facing challenges wisely, and optimizing innovative opportunities, companies can create effective and relevant marketing strategies that enable them to achieve their business goals and maintain a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market and dynamic.

CLOSING

In concluding the discussion of the zero price paradox, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of this phenomenon in the context of economics and consumer behavior. Although in theory a zero price should be a driver of high demand because it offers a product or service for free, in reality a zero price is often less effective in encouraging consumers to take action than a low price. This shows that the zero price paradox phenomenon is not something simple, but is influenced by various factors, including perceived value, consumer psychology, and broader economic factors. Nonetheless, a deeper understanding of this phenomenon can help companies and marketers design more effective marketing strategies and understand consumer behavior better. Therefore, while the zero price paradox represents a significant challenge in driving consumer demand, it also opens the door for further exploration and innovation in marketing strategies. With a thoughtful approach and deep understanding of the factors that influence consumer behavior, companies can overcome this paradox and create greater value for their consumers.

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