Cheap or Efficient? Price-Quality Perceptions and the Low-Price Strategy of Mixue

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ABSTRACT

This report examined the aspects of Mixue's low-price and the relationship with perceived product quality in the competitive market of beverage milk tea and ice cream. Mixue was established in 1997 and Mixue has been able to expand its operations in Asia due to its focus on low cost and efficient operations. The report explores how the pricing approach of Mixue based on cost leadership and value-based pricing makes the brand not only affordable but lucrative. The analysis is anchored in the 4P Marketing Mix and Zeithaml's (1988) means-end model of price, quality and value, which explain why a low price can be read as a signal of low quality. Meanwhile, Mixue dispels the general view that low price is low quality. Through comparisons with other competitors the studies determine whether or not the low pricing of Mixue undermines the quality of its products, services, or brand name. Even though Mixue is affordable than others, the competitive ability of the company to extend to a broader market and increase customer loyalty among customers who are sensitive to price. There are also adverse perceptions of diminished quality and constraints on access to the higher-end markets. Furthermore, this report discusses how centralized production can be used to sustain low cost without compromising safety or taste proving that the low competitive advantage of Mixue is the product of efficiency and not standards. Overall, it can be implied that the high level of success that Mixue achieved was due to its ability to maintain the level of open communication and the quality of its products that remained consistent hence overcome the stigma of cheapness and align the brand as the standard of affordable and yet high-quality products in the sphere of the modern fast-service industry.

Keywords: Pricing strategy, price-quality perception, cost leadership, Mixue.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of Mixue's product has drawn academic attention to its unusual business model in the highly competitive milk tea and ice-cream drink industry. Founded in China in 1997, Mixue has grown into a major chain by offering affordable products and leveraging a low-cost but high-volume strategy. Mixue "stands out among many milk-tea brands with its low price" and successfully applies the 4P marketing theory to profitably meet consumer demand (Shi et al., 2023). Meanwhile, its entire operating model emphasises "low price and efficient supply chain" as major drivers of expansion.

Hence, the first key point in this study is pricing strategy Mixue's conscious decision to adopt a low-price positioning rather than premium pricing has been central to its market penetration and brand growth.This low-price strategy does more than merely attract budget-conscious consumers it has become a positioning tool that differentiates Mixue in a saturated market. Analysis of the marketing strategy of Mixue ice cream & tea on social media platforms (Liu et al., 2023) describe the brand's "price advantage" as one of the pillars of the marketing strategy. Another study found that Mixue's products are 30% cheaper than similar products in the market, highlighting the depth of its cost competitiveness (Liu et al., 2023). In short, Mixue is not merely cheap ice-cream but strategically low price to target young and price-conscious customers, who prioritise affordability. However, is there a quality concession in exchange for such aggressive low pricing?

This leads into the fundamental question of this assignment "low quality?". Although the pricing model adopted by Mixue is a clear step towards its growth and expansion, it is important to review whether such a success comes at the cost of quality being compromised. The research on Mixue has recommended strengthening the quality of assurance of its product and the quality of the services, meaning that the low-cost model may mean the pressure on the specified aspects (Ramadhan et al., 2023). Moreover, a research conducted in the Malaysian market shows that in addition to price perception, service and brand trust also inf-

luence consumer loyalty (Salleh et al., 2023). Thus, this case study will explore the ways of Mixue's pricing strategy related with the perceived and actual quality, the ways in which the value proposition of the brand actually provides good quality at a low price or it is the low-price positioning of the product that indirectly recalls low quality. The report targets Mixue Malaysia but some of the data and literature are based on Mixue China.

Problem Statement

The primary challenge facing Mixue's pricing strategy is the pervasive consumer bias that equates low price points with low product quality. Pricing is not only about cost recovery but also about how customers interpret value. When a price is markedly lower than that of competitors, consumers often suspect inferior quality (Lii et al., 2023; Zeithaml, 1988). This perception bias creates a major challenge for brands that implement low-cost or penetration pricing strategies, as affordability is sometimes mistaken for cheapness rather than efficiency (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

For Mixue, this stigma threatens brand image and consumer trust, even though the company maintains the necessary product standards (Nalendra et al., 2023). Many customers assume that low-priced products use inferior materials or are not durable enough (Gabriel & Santos, 2021), which reinforces the stereotype that a cheap product is meant only for those in extreme need and creates an image challenge even where the products meet the desired quality level. The tension is therefore between actual operational efficiency and perceived cheapness: the same efficiency that allows Mixue to charge less is what some customers may misread as a lack of quality.

Price-oriented buyers, especially younger ones, react differently, as affordable prices raise satisfaction and loyalty and reduce negative perceptions (Handayani & Ristra, 2023). The core problem for Mixue is therefore balancing aggressive affordability with perceived value. The company must communicate that its prices result from centralized production, bulk buying and high operational efficiency rather than compromised product standards, and it must keep those standards consistent to sustain consumer trust and long-term competitiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in three complementary frameworks: the 4P Marketing Mix, the means-end model of price, quality and value together with the price-quality heuristic, and a cost leadership approach to pricing. Together they explain how Mixue sets its prices, why consumers may misinterpret them, and how the brand can justify them.

The 4P Marketing Mix. Shi et al. (2023) show that Mixue applies the 4P marketing theory to meet consumer demand profitably and to stand out in a saturated market. Among the four elements, price is the foundation: Liu et al. (2023) identify the brand's price advantage as one of the pillars of its marketing strategy on social media platforms. By sustaining this advantage, Mixue targets young, price-conscious consumers who prioritise affordability.

Means-End Chain Model and the Price-Quality Heuristic. Zeithaml (1988) explains that consumers link price to quality, and in turn to perceived value, especially when they lack detailed information about ingredients and manufacturing procedures. In that situation price works as an extrinsic cue (Rao & Monroe, 1989; Javeed et al., 2022) that signals product worth and market position. Because Mixue's prices are markedly lower than those of Tealive, Gong Cha and Chatime, the heuristic predicts that some consumers will infer lower quality even where none exists. This is the perception bias examined in this study.

Cost Leadership and Value-Based Pricing. Mixue combines a low-cost approach with value-based pricing to reach all classes of society (Aditya Nalendra et al., 2022). The low price is sustained by vertical integration, in which the company controls raw material procurement, manufacturing and distribution, keeping operating expenses stable (Zhang, 2025). This framework supports the argument that Mixue's low price reflects efficiency rather than lower standards.

The frameworks are linked as follows. The 4Ps and cost leadership describe the supply side, that is, why Mixue is able to price low. The price-quality heuristic describes the demand side, that is, how consumers may interpret that price. The sections that follow use this lens to analyse Mixue's pricing strategies, the relationship between low price and low quality, and the impact of the low-price strategy.

Mixue Pricing Strategies

Pricing strategy can be defined as the managerial choices that are made regarding the setting and adjusting of prices in response to the market opportunities and competition (Igani et al., 2025). It entails setting the original price of a product and adjusting it according to some variables such as customer perception, the cost of production, company aims and competitive positioning. The strategy creates profitability, customer retention and competitiveness in the market in food and beverage firms.A study found that food and beverages companies commonly use value-based, market-based, and cost-plus pricing approaches, influenced by customer preferences, competitor prices, and production costs (Michael, 2022). These pricing methods help them balance profitability with customer satisfaction while remaining competitive in the market.

Mixue employs a low cost and value pricing strategy to target all classes of the society (Aditya Nalendra et al., 2022). The analysis reveals that price is a strong factor that affects the brand image and the buying decision, whereby Mixue will offer low and competitive prices and yet offer quality to create a positive image among the consumers (Aditya Nalendra et al., 2022). This policy gives Mixue a chance to be a low cost but quality brand, which means that its products can be affordable to most customers and can contribute to its fast growth in the market. The advantage of the low price high-quality products mix that Mixue applies is that it will be appealing to various customers including those who are price sensitive and will create strong brand loyalty and trust (Putri, 2024). This plan also helps to improve the brand image of Mixue as a low-cost but high-quality product in the market. Mixue can also address the market and competitors by providing more value than money, which will attract customers out of the rival quality products with higher prices. Its low prices compel competitors to change their strategies, and Mixue can get an opportunity to increase its market share and become stronger in the industry.

Mixue is focusing on the mass market with a low-price strategy that facilitates affordability on a daily basis and a high rate of growth. Its frequent, price-sensitive customers are drawn by the low prices of its drinks (under 10 Yuan or RM5.90) and their low prices due to its efficient supply chain. This practice will facilitate the rapid expansion of Mixue to over 30,000 stores in China and dominate the low-end market with a high volume and large-scale sales (Zhang, 2024). In the meantime, there are Mixue competitors that implement the strategy of value and affordable pricing, which is able to balance the quality and cost to appeal to a wide range of customers (Mohd Khairulanuwa et al., 2024). The company projects itself as serving cheap prices and quality ingredients whose beverages are available as cheap as RM7 or 12 Yuan per cup and it is affordable to students and young professionals and they make a profit of higher sales volume. Pricing at other competitors are customized depending on the option of customization, and this gives consumers flexibility depending on their budget. This affordable to middle income price is what helps the brand to stay competitive in the bubble tea market and attract both price sensitive and trend conscious buyers.

Mixue aims at the mass market with a rigid low pricing initiative with an effective supply network that has facilitated low cost and a fast growth rate in China. This strategy is expected to drive its rapid development and acceptability in Malaysia. On the other hand, their competitor uses a value-based low pricing strategy that is competitive in terms of quality versus cost to lure students and young professionals. Whereas Mixue is more focused on volume-based expansion by offering ultra-low prices, while competitors focus on affordable quality and customization according to different budgets. Comprehensively, Mixue has owned the low-end market because of its size and low cost in the Chinese ready-made tea industry

Relationships Between Low Price And Low Quality

The low-cost strategy of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea makes it possible to expand both locally and internationally in a very short period of time. Mixue sells milk tea, smoothies and ice cream at RM5–RM6, whereas competitors such as Tealive, Gong Cha and Chatime sell at RM9–RM13. Depending on the comparison, this is a price gap of roughly 33% to 60%, wider than the average 30% difference reported for Mixue in the Chinese market (Liu et al., 2023). Price functions as a value indicator which shows product worth together with its position in the market (Zeithaml, 1988). Mixue uses its market position to beat competitors by delivering affordable prices through efficient business operations and extensive store network availability.

Mixue's cost-saving mechanisms can be grouped into four areas, which together support the argument that its prices reflect efficiency rather than cheapness. First, vertical integration: the company manages every production phase, including raw material procurement, manufacturing and distribution, which shields it from external price increases and keeps operational expenses stable (Zhang, 2025). Second, standardized menus built on fundamental ingredients such as milk and tea reduce food waste and make staff training more efficient (Lu, 2024). Third, buying materials in bulk lowers unit costs, and fourth, social media marketing replaces expensive traditional advertising while keeping the brand visible (Cui, 2024; Chen et al., 2023). Basic store layouts and minimal packaging further reduce overheads. Combined with centralized production and high-volume sales to price-sensitive young consumers, these mechanisms keep Mixue profitable without lowering product standards.

Research indicates that consumers base their quality assessments on price when they do not have access to detailed information about brand ingredients and manufacturing procedures (Zeithaml, 1988). Mixue controls the affordable drinks market and due to their low cost low value model, people tend to believe that their drinks are of low quality. To be honest, the notion of cheaper in the case of lowering the price, always implies poor quality, it is just a mental trick that people use in place of the actual product features. Mixue keeps its prices lower than Tealive and Gong Cha which leads customers to believe the company uses lower-cost ingredients and less expensive preparation techniques (Schindler, 2011). Mixue positions itself as a practical brand through its focus on attracting mass-market customers and its use of basic store layouts and budget-friendly marketing methods (Nalendra et al., 2023).

Because these savings come from the way the business is run rather than from the ingredients used, the low price does not affect the flavour or safety of its products, and continued quality improvement has reduced negative views of cost-effective products over time. Mixue explains its low prices through operational efficiency rather than the use of cheap materials (Muhammad & Kusdiyanto, 2024).

The public usually thinks cheap products lack quality yet Mixue reaches its prices through vertical integration and bulk purchasing and minimal marketing expenses without compromising product quality (Levrini et al., 2021; Muhammad & Kusdiyanto, 2024). Research further shows that brands can enhance trust and perceived quality by explaining that lower prices arise from operational efficiency rather than compromised product standards (Javeed et al., 2022). The low prices at Mixue create the impression that cheap products must be of poor quality but the company maintains high standards and provides complete information which leads customers to assess value through price-performance ratios instead of quality reduction.

Impact of Low Price on Mixue

The success of Mixue in the competitive beverage market is intimately associated with the pricing strategy and the perception of the quality of the product by the consumers. Nevertheless, the association of low price and perceived quality leaves the brand with a complicated scenario. Most buyers would often associate lower prices with inferior quality of the product and this affects both their buying behavior and the general perception towards the product and the brand (Ziethaml, 1988). In the case of Mixue, it is a struggle to retain consumer confidence and convince them that its low prices are a result of efficient operations and not low quality. The perception is significant in influencing whether the consumers will opt to purchase or reject the product of Mixue. The effect to be expounded will be categorized in two, positive impact and negative impacts.

The advantage that Mixue will experience due to low-price strategy is the growth of consumer purchase intention (Fitri, R. A., and Anggarini, D. T. 2025). The positioning of the brand of providing drinks and desserts at the reduced price compared to the competitors. The prices of the product offered by Mixue can be affordable to price-sensitive customers, particularly students and young adults. The reason is that a large number of consumers will purchase the product of the Mixue as they believe that the Mixue provides good value money even though the presentation is minimal (Muhammad, S., & Kusdiyanto, K. 2024). The feeling of good value money encourages the repeat purchases and assists Mixue to keep the customer loyalty (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Consequently, the low price serves as a means of increasing the volume of sales as well as consolidating the brand image as a product of choice in the market by those who desire affordable yet good quality products.

Next, Mixue's low cost Strategy contributes significantly to its wider market reach. By offering affordable beverages and desserts, the brand becomes accessible to a larger segment of consumers, including those who may not usually purchase from premium tea or dessert outlets (Tanner, M. 2025) . This accessibility allows Mixue to penetrate both urban and suburban market ease. The low operational and production costs that Mixue is able to uphold allow them to launch additional outlets at a high rate thereby being able to expand both domestically and internationally (Tanner, M., 2025). As a result, Mixue is able to increase its overall market share, as well as strengthen its positions in the competitive beverage industry (Zhang, Q. 2025) . This broad accessibility not only maximizes brand awareness but also allows Mixue to create a strong customer base across various regions.

Perception of low quality among consumers is one of the primary negative effects that Mixue will suffer because of the low-price strategy. Lower prices are seen as signs of poor quality by the consumers since they tend to believe that the ingredients involved might be not fresh or that the hygiene standards might be lower than other competitors (Schindler, 2020). Thus, certain groups of consumers may distrust the reliability or safety of Mixue's products or opt to patronize competitors positioned as high-end products in the market. This would keep premium buyers from consuming Mixue's products and might limit the brand's target to only those who buy based on prices. Therefore, consistent product quality and transparency in the process of production will be key in overcoming this negative perception.

Next, Mixue's price commitment has produced a fairly uniform customer profile. Because few brands maintain such low prices, Mixue captures the price-sensitive segment, especially students and young adults, which creates huge sales volumes. The trade-off is that this strategy restricts access to higher-end markets. The brand image risks becoming permanently associated with the lower end of the market, which in the long run makes it less competitive against brands such as Tealive or Gong Cha and complicates any future move into premium segments, as customers may find the brand lacks the appeal or glamour that typically accompanies a high-end drink experience.

In conclusion, the low price policy of Mixue has played a significant role in attracting numerous consumers as well as increasing the market. It also causes numerous adverse effects such as the vision of poor quality as well as the impossibility to appeal to high-end consumers. To sustain a long term performance, Mixue has to ensure that their product is constant of quality and transparent such that its low price can be perceived by customers as an indicator of high efficiency and not as a low quality product..

CONCLUSION

Mixue has become a successful company, which shows that a low-cost, low-price strategy can lead to substantial growth and market coverage. The low prices have ensured that Mixue draws the attention of young consumers and stands out in the highly competitive food and beverage market. Nevertheless, the same policy poses a problem: many people still associate low prices with low quality. As the price-quality heuristic (Zeithaml, 1988) predicts, this notion still influences how part of the consumers perceive the brand, despite the cost efficiency of its operations and its cost management. In theoretical terms, the 4P Marketing Mix and cost leadership explain why Mixue can price low, while the price-quality heuristic explains why that price may still be misread.

It must ensure that affordability is balanced with perceived value by ensuring consistency in its product, enhancing the quality of the service, and making sure people understand that the low prices come because of smart efficiency rather than low quality, which will guarantee the continued success of the Mixue as a brand of offering a good quality at a low price in the current unpredictable market.

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