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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Mediating Effect of Customer Satisfaction in Enhancing Customer Loyalty

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The development of customer loyalty is a crucial aspect within the domain of post-sales services, as it plays a substantial role in supporting the continuation of organizational operations. The main aim of this study is to investigate the influence of brand image and perceived price on customer loyalty, with a focus on the role of customer satisfaction as a mediating variable. The current study is anticipated to provide valuable insights for the automotive sector, particularly in the domain of theater sales, employing a quantitative research methodology. The data obtained through the administration of questionnaires is afterwards subjected to analysis in order to determine the correlation between variables. The evaluation of the questionnaire's validity and reliability has been carried out through rigorous testing. The current investigation employs the Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis methodology. The study was carried out at Auto2000 West Sumatra. The study's results demonstrate a notable correlation between brand impression and customer loyalty, with consumer satisfaction serving as an intermediary variable in this relationship. The correlation between brand image and customer loyalty is contingent upon the mediating impact of customer satisfaction. In order to enhance client retention and subsequently augment organizational income, it is imperative for organizations to prioritize brand perception and customer pleasure.

INTRODUCTION

Automobiles have evolved into an indispensable requirement within contemporary civilization. The utilization of private automobiles as the predominant or exclusive means of transportation in rural regions is linked to social and cultural concerns (Carroll et al., 2021). Significant disparities in travel patterns and car ownership choices exist between genders, indicating the necessity for additional scholarly investigation and governmental initiatives aimed at addressing the mobility requirements specific to older women (Ahmad et al., 2019). Not all communities have the economic or socio-cultural capital needed to encourage the transfer of modes from private motor vehicles to active modes (Biehl et al., 2019). Land transportation, encompassing individual and commercial automobiles, the predominant mode of transportation, particularly in urban areas undergoing development (Salama & Jabbar, 2022). The platform possesses the capability to efficiently handle multiple time-sensitive demands and offers a diverse range of transportation alternatives, such as utilizing automobiles for passenger transportation (Périvier et al., 2021).

Taking care of the car is important for longer durability. The level of vehicle maintenance required is contingent upon the cumulative distance driven by the vehicle within a recurring time frame, such as days, months, or years (Caban et al., 2019). Damage to vehicle parts can lead to high maintenance costs

(Khairallah et al., 2019). Car maintenance deals with fuel consumption and EMI, emissions of pollutants, and international combustion that also impact the environment (Mrozik & Merkisz-Guranowska, 2021). Moreover, the importance of automobiles in supporting family groups is a prominent issue that should be taken into account (Blumenberg et al., 2022). Car maintenance recording can be done with digital management software (Thacker et al., 2022).

The provision of automobile maintenance services is a lucrative business potential within the automotive industry, as consumers have a pressing need to ensure the proper care and upkeep of their vehicles. The automotive aftermarket encompasses a broad range of operations, including many aspects such as post-purchase vehicle maintenance and the last phase of the vehicle's lifespan. This includes all activities related to spare parts and after-sales services (Hsieh & Zhang, 2022). Manufacturers are inclined to participate in third-party platforms when their operation and maintenance expenses are minimal. However, the rise in share price subsequently results in a subsequent increase in operation and maintenance expenses. On the contrary, the act of selling results in a reduction of operation and maintenance expenses (Mao et al., 2021). When considering the advantages of motorcycles over automobiles, one might highlight the enhanced driving experience, improved parking convenience, and reduced maintenance costs (Will et al., 2021).

The establishment of customer loyalty is crucial in ensuring the sustained operation of a firm after the completion of sales transactions. To improve operational efficiency, organizations in the vehicle after-sales industry must focus on enhancing the precision of demand forecasts, minimizing the lead times associated with supply chains, and the optimization of stock availability (Hsieh & Zhang, 2022). The comfort of vehicle sales, the economic Fit, and the perceived fairness of each significantly affect the resale value (Nasrul & Hamid, 2021). After-sales business activities are very diverse, among others. Exemplary instances of practices include enhancements made to junctions, parks, and pavement initiatives, transforming them into plazas, playgrounds, ciclovia's, and open roadways. The research examined demonstrates the favorable effects on physical activity, active transportation, safety, social contact, capital, and a wider range of benefits. The prevalence of motor vehicle workshops has been steadily rising on an annual basis (Nasrul & Hamid, 2021).

From 2019 to 2021, customer loyalty to the West Sumatra Auto 2000 workshop decreased. The primary objective of business operations is to cultivate and sustain customer loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2018). A favorable reaction engenders a favorable consumer reaction, which therefore promotes customer loyalty. (Islam et al., 2021). Customer loyalty is a vital factor within the realm of marketing science. The establishment of a robust and dependable relationship between the consumer and the organization is a crucial determinant of genuine client loyalty. Evaluating customer loyalty requires the use of measures centered on customers' propensity to provide recommendations or engage in favorable communications, along with their intention to make repeat purchases and pay higher prices (Mclean, 2020).

Auto 2000 has been unable to ascertain the variables affecting customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is a function of perceived fairness during service failure recovery (Mclean, 2020). Companies must manage the marketing mix well to customers and create customer loyalty. Loyalty circles are so named to emphasize that customer loyalty is built whenever a service meets customer expectations (Sudari et al., 2019). In the pursuit of client loyalty, firms endeavor to identify the optimal components that might effectively foster customer retention (Sudari et al., 2019). Customer loyalty is closely associated with reduced marketing operational costs and enhanced company profitability, which directly affects the results a company achieves. (Raza et al., n.d.).

Identifying the determinants influencing client loyalty is crucial. Previous research has revealed multiple characteristics that play a role in fostering client loyalty, such as customer satisfaction, engagement, and service quality (Abror et al., 2019). Customer loyalty refers to the overt inclination towards a certain firm, characterized by the aim to sustain future purchases from such company and the inclination to expand commercial interactions with it (Bill et al., 2020). The association between a brand or organization and cognitive happiness is known to contribute to the development of client loyalty (Prentice & Nguyen, 2020). The establishment of a favorable price structure has the potential to generate client happiness and foster long-term loyalty (Hult et al., 2019).

Research has significant value for company in enhancing consumer loyalty. A suggested conceptual model aims to enhance the understanding of how customer loyalty may be improved by integrating the qualities of service quality, pricing justice, customer happiness, brand image, and trust (Singh et al., 2021). Customer behavior in buying one-brand products is considered a condition of loyalty based entirely on satisfaction (Othman et al., 2019). Client loyalty to the company, its services and its goods motivates them to demonstrate consistent buying behavior despite the strenuous efforts of competitors to persuade clients to change their buying behavior (Rjoub, 2020). The conduct of regular customers has the potential to shape their requirements for contact and engagement, which subsequently impacts the correlation between value development activities and consumer loyalty (Lee et al., 2018). The attributes that contribute to consumer loyalty towards sellers or services include customers' favorable feedback about logistics service providers that are recognized as the top performers in delivering exceptional service to clients (Lee et al., 2018).

Company revenue can increase through after-sales business. Investors value revenue growth and added value provided by a company's products or services as more important than the track record of the management team (Lee et al., 2018). The management of a company model necessitates a serious approach, as changes may significantly impact how a company operates and generates revenue. To increase the income of different companies, research n recommendation systems appeared over the last decade and consisted of valuable services (Niemimaa et al., 2019). Monetary rewards, enterprise scale, enterprise industry, and demographics (year of birth) are the most important features for income classification (Choi et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing

Marketing is founded around the theory and ideology of the marketing concept, whereby the seller tries to discern and address the wants and aspirations of the target market more effectively than rivals (He & Harris, 2020). The principal aim of marketing is to enhance the quantity and quality of digital business contacts, while concurrently mitigating transaction costs for users and production expenses (Rangaswamy et al., 2020). The utilization of traditional marketing methods in online communities has the potential to enhance the frequency of usage on a weekly basis and entice fresh participants. However, it mostly stimulates consumers' inner motivation to interact with a certain brand (Xi & Hamari, 2020). Marketing, as an academic subject, has shown a commendable history of effectively coordinating and integrating several fields of knowledge in order to propel future objectives (Lim et al., 2021). A well-executed marketing strategy has the potential to generate interest among prospective clients. The fundamental principles of modern marketing revolve around the processes of sales and meeting client demands. The successful understanding of consumer demands, effective consumer engagement, the creation of products that provide better value to customers, and the provision of appropriate pricing, distribution, and advertising strategies are crucial factors that contribute to the increased ease of product sales in the market. (Utami & Supriadi, 2023).

Currently, the field of marketing is seeing a significant transformation due to environmental disturbances and advancements in marketing technology. The aforementioned transformation has significant ramifications for the process of making marketing decisions. Nevertheless, there is a need to do more study about the strategies used by marketing managers in effectively navigating the complex, unpredictable, and information-rich contemporary marketing landscape (Nordin & Ravald, 2023). Marketing, as a discipline, is not only a concept but also influenced by prevailing patterns and contemporary strategies for promoting items through the Internet and social media platforms. The utilization of technology and artificial intelligence is employed to facilitate the development of market mastering procedures. The prevailing trajectory of contemporary digital marketing is progressively shifting towards a customer-centric approach, which may be accomplished via various methods and using diverse instruments (Zintso et al., 2023).

In order to drive sales, sellers are required to employ strategically integrated marketing tools and implement distinct marketing strategies tailored to the specific characteristics of different product kinds (Li et al., 2023). In practical application, it is seen that the transition from offline to online platforms is not only limited to the availability of scarce items, but also encompasses the

transformation of marketing strategies. Businesses in rural areas often choose online platforms as their preferred means of communication and engagement (Widiastini et al., 2023).

Customer Loyalty (CL)

The concept of consumer loyalty refers to the tendency of customers to consistently engage in repeat purchases or exhibit a strong preference for a particular brand refers to the extent to which customers engage in repeated purchasing actions, possess a positive disposition towards service providers, and demonstrate a preference for these suppliers while seeking services (Sen et al., 2023). Customer loyalty can be conceptualized as the unwavering dedication of a consumer to regularly purchase or subscribe to a favored product or service in consecutive instances, even when faced with situational influences and marketing strategies that may tempt them to switch to alternative possibilities (Suyanto & Femi, 2023). Customer loyalty is comprised of two distinct components, specifically behavioral loyalty and attitude. Loyalty behavior pertains to the recurring patronage exhibited by customers who consistently engage in the purchase of a particular product or service. On the other hand, loyalty attitude encompasses the inclination to maintain ongoing communication and connection with a firm (Ho & Wong, 2023).

Customer Satisfaction (CS)

The research conducted revealed the presence of a statistically significant correlation with a positive path direction the relationship between consumer satisfaction and client loyalty. This indicates that when there is a rise in consumer satisfaction, there is a corresponding rise in customer retention. (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). Customer satisfaction is the subjective assessment or feeling expressed by an individual regarding the quality of a service or product they have gotten, according to their initial expectations. The primary focus lies on ensuring client happiness, hence cultivating their ongoing loyalty towards the organization. Consequently, this facilitates the ability of organizations to improve their financial performance and establish enduring viability within their specific sectors (Balinado et al., 2021). Customer satisfaction is a term used to describe the discernible actions and conduct exhibited by individuals following their acquisition of a certain product or utilization of a particular service. These actions and conduct serve as indicators of their general emotion and level of contentment. This phenomena exemplifies the comprehensive assessment conducted by consumers about the utilization of various items or services (Asheq, 2020).

Brand Image (BI)

The brand image encompasses the perspectives, interpretations, and sentiments held by customers in relation to a brand. Hence, it is essential for organizations to prioritize the establishment and maintenance of their corporate image. When customers exhibit brand loyalty, they actively stay informed about the brand's progress and actively avoid engaging with rivals, so contributing to the overall success of the firm (Moslehpour et al., 2022). Brand image, sometimes referred to as brand association, encompasses all the cognitive associations stored in memory that are connected to a particular brand (Martínez & Nishiyama, 2019). The perception of a brand held by customers has both symbolic meaning and functional aspects. Symbolic meaning refers to the intangible qualities associated with a specific feature of a product or service, while function pertains to the physical or practical aspects. Hence, the brand's perceived quality and client attitudes and affections towards the brand can potentially be impacted by its brand image (Kim & Chao, 2019).

The Impact of Brand Image on Customer Loyalty, with Customer Satisfaction as a Mediating Factor

The impact of brand image on customer loyalty is substantial, with customer happiness as an intermediary factor (Arif & Syahputri, 2021). Consumer satisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping the brand image, ultimately influencing consumer loyalty in a good and substantial manner (Junaedi et al., 2022). In order to foster client satisfaction and subsequently cultivate customer loyalty, it is imperative for the organization to retain a favorable corporate image (Yazid, 2020).

Hypothesis

Brand Image significantly affects customer loyalty with customer satisfaction as mediation.

Research Model

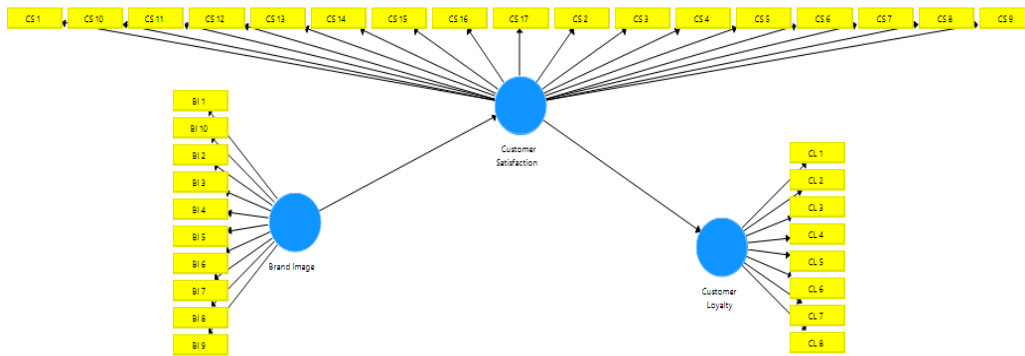The research model is as follows, based on the study mentioned above:

Figure 1. Structural Model

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

ANALYSIS METHOD

Operation Definition

Customer loyalty can be defined as a commitment that strongly involves consistently repurchasing or resubscribing goods from the same service provider or the same service provider in the future. This can lead to repeated purchases from the same brand or purchases specified by the brand (Cheng et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction is a crucial determinant that significantly affects customer retention, trust, and creates barriers to customers switching to other products or companies. From a consumer perspective, the assessment of color satisfaction serves as a valuable tool in conveying more transparent insights on the levels of happiness or dissatisfaction experienced by fellow customers towards a certain product or service. The acquisition of high-quality information is anticipated to enable consumers to enhance their ability to make well-informed purchasing selections and minimize unfavorable interactions with fellow customers (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). The concept of brand image refers to the symbolic representation or communication of the intended significance associated with a brand. The concept of brand image often pertains to the perception that customers have towards the product or service offered by a certain brand. The brand image also signifies the enduring impression that a buyer forms in their concern for a particular brand. A brand that has a favorable image tends to be favored and accrue more benefits within the market, including the reinforcement of its position and performance, as well as safeguarding the brand from competitive forces (Kusumawardani & Yolanda, 2021.

Variable Measurement

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Variable Concept	Indicator
Brand Image (X)	A set of brand associations that are formed and embedded in the minds of consumers. This can be created based on personal experience or hearing its reputation from others or the media.	1. Brand identify 2. Brand Personality 3. Brand association 4. Brand attitude and behavior 5. Brand benefit and competence
Customer Satisfaction (Y1)	Individuals' perceptions or feelings toward the type of service or product they receive to their expectations	1. Quality image 2. Relational outcomes 3. Order fulfillment 4. Inside customer service support 5. Delivery service 6. Reporting and billing 7. Outside salesperson support 8. Recommendation

Customer Loyalty (Y2)	A result obtained from customer satisfaction with a product or service, this loyalty has a positive impact on the company, such as loyal customers making repeated purchases of the company's products	1. Referring to others 2. Demonstrate immunity to pull from competitors 3. Perform regular repurchase (service) 4. Buying across product and service lines

Source: Journal.

Population and Sample

The demography being examined comprises the customer base of the Auto2000 West Sumatra workshop. The research study used a sample size of 254 people. The model under consideration pertains to the customer base of the Auto2000 West Sumatra workshop, which offers services for automobiles built between 2019 and 2021, with a particular focus on the cooperative automotive models made by Toyota and Daihatsu. The research used a purposive sampling methodology. The data analysis conducted in this study was performed using the SmartPLS software version 3.2.9. SmartPLS is a software application that facilitates researchers in analyzing data to investigate models.

Methods of Data Collection

Researchers that use primary data collecting techniques get information from individuals by administering questionnaires that include measurement tools such as Likert scales. Five options were used for the criteria as follows:

Table 2. Skala Likert

Number	Answer	Code	Value
1	Sangat Setuju (Strongly Agree)	SS	5
2	Setuju (Agree)	SS	4
3	Neutral (Neutral)	N	3
4	Tidak Setuju (Disagree)	TS	2
5	Sangat Tidak Setuju (Strongly Disagree)	STS	1

Source: Journal

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings report comprises a part on research results and discussion.

Test of the Measurement Model

The figure below illustrates the measurement model for conducting validity and reliability tests. It also displays the coefficients and coefficient of determination for the overall model, as well as the path coefficients for the equation model:

Convergent Validity

Following are the results of convergent validity calculations conducted with the software SmartPLS 3.2.9:

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Var	Brand Image	Var	Customer Loyalty	Var	Customer Satisfaction
BI 2	0.832	CL 2	0.757	CS 2	0.816
BI 3	0.856	CL 3	0.837	CS 3	0.791
BI 4	0.745	CL 4	0.792	CS 4	0.816
BI 5	0.844	CL 5	0.802	CS 5	0.841
BI 6	0.759	CL 6	0.839	CS 6	0.856
BI 7	0.875	CL 7	0.831	CS 7	0.777
BI 8	0.852	CL 8	0.756	CS 8	0.736
BI 9	0.827			CS 9	0.722

BI 10	0.829			CS 11	0.776
				CS 16	0.805
				CS 17	0.753

<div align="center">Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes</div>

The study used a threshold of 0.7 (> 0.7) for the outer loading value, which serves as a measure for evaluating Convergent Validity. When an indicator surpasses this threshold, it is determined to satisfy the criterion for Convergent Validity. During the first calculation procedure at SmartPLS, it was seen that eight indicators exhibited values below the threshold of 0.7. These indicators include BI indicators 1, CS 1, CS 10, CS 12, CS 13, CS 14, CS 15, and CL 1. All indicators that do not meet the criteria after the calculation process in SmartPLS are removed, then the indicators that meet the requirements are shown in Table 3. According to the findings presented in Table 3, it is evident that all indicators satisfy the established criterion for Convergent Validity, as evidenced by their Outer Loading values exceeding the threshold of 0.7.

Discriminant Validity

<div align="center">**Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**</div>

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Result
Brand Image	0.681	Valid
Customer Loyalty	0.644	Valid
Customer Satisfaction	0.626	Valid

<div align="center">Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes</div>

Validity testing is a procedure used to determine the validity of data. In this context, data is considered legitimate if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above a threshold of 0.5. Conversely, if the AVE falls below 0.5, the data is deemed invalid (Hasan & Elviana, 2023).

Composite Reliability

<div align="center">**Table 5. Composite Reliability**</div>

Variable	Composite Reliability	Result
Brand Image	0.950	Acceptable
Customer Loyalty	0.927	Acceptable
Customer Satisfaction	0.948	Acceptable

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

In confirmatory research, it is necessary for variable values in Composite Reliability testing to exceed 0.7, although a range of 0.6-0.7 is deemed acceptable for exploratory analysis. The variables X and Y exhibit Composite dependability values that above the threshold of 0.7, indicating a satisfactory level of dependability for all variables, as seen in the aforementioned table.

Cronbach's Alpha

<div align="center">**Table 6. Cronbach's Alpha**</div>

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Brand Image	0.941	Reliable
Customer Loyalty	0.908	Reliable
Customer Satisfaction	0.940	Reliable

<div align="center">Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes</div>

Cronbach's Alpha, employed as a measure of reliability, serves as a supplementary evaluation to the composite reliability results. A variable is deemed dependable when its Cronbach's Alpha value surpasses the threshold of 0.7. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for variables X and Y above the threshold of 0.7, indicating a high level of reliability for both measures employed in the study. The evaluation of the outer model provides insights into the quality and reliability of the data.

Inner Model

Model FIT

Model fit tests are used in statistical analysis to evaluate how much the proposed model matches the observed data. The model is suitable if the SRMR value < 0.1.

Table 7. SRMR Value

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR Value	0.070	0.073

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

The SRMR values in the table above are 0.069 and 0.073, which indicates that the model is Fit.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value is used to evaluate construct multicollinearity.

Table 8. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Variable	VIF	Variable	VIF	Variable	VIF
BI 10	2.766	CL 2	1.802	CS 11	2.540
BI 2	3.201	CL 3	3.172	CS 16	2.693
BI 3	3.540	CL 4	2.313	CS 17	2.087
BI 4	2.609	CL 5	2.425	CS 2	3.231
BI 5	3.398	CL 6	2.786	CS 3	2.779
BI 6	2.340	CL 7	2.568	CS 4	2.970
BI 7	4.164	CL 8	2.594	CS 5	3.837
BI 8	2.982			CS 6	3.491
BI 9	3.118			CS 7	2.602
				CS 8	3.459
				CS 9	2.824

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

From the data in Table 8 above, all VIF values < 5, which implies that there is no overlap between constructs.

Hypothesis Test

Table 8. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
BI -> CS -> CL	0.694	0.696	0.039	17.698	0.000

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

The results shown in Table 8 demonstrate that the T Statistic value of 17.698 exceeds the crucial threshold of 1.96, indicating statistical significance. Furthermore, the obtained P value of 0.000 is found to be lower than the predetermined significance level of 0.05, hence providing additional evidence in favor of the conclusion of statistical significance. The results suggest that the hypothesis is validated, suggesting that Customer Satisfaction (CS) may operate as a mediator in the relationship between the Brand Image (BI) variable and the Customer Loyalty (CL) variable. The initial value of the sample is

0.694. This value signifies a positively oriented association between Brand Image (BI) and Customer Loyalty (CL), which is influenced by Customer Satisfaction (CS).
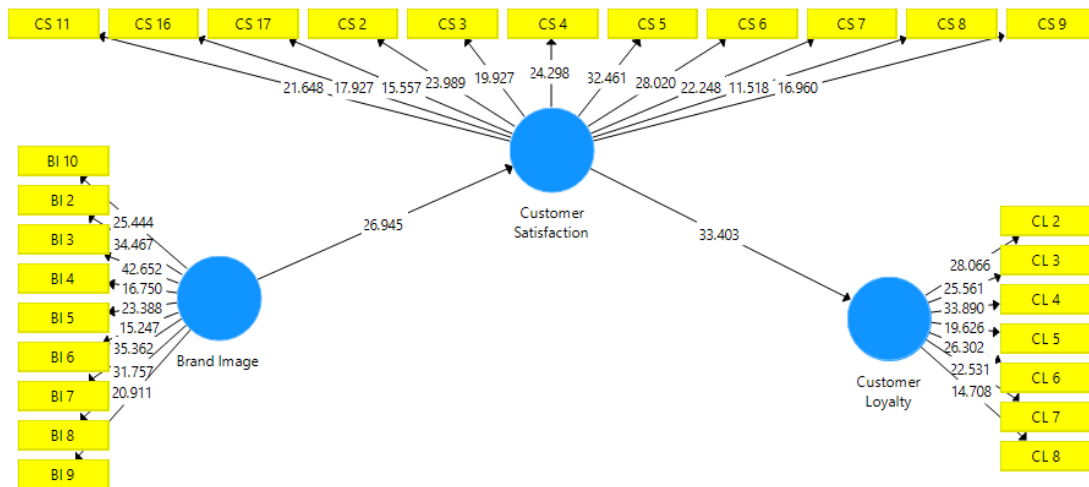

Figure 2. Inner Model

Source: SmartPLS data processing outcomes

CONCLUSION

Auto 2000, a company focusing on the after-sales business, realized they needed to encourage customer loyalty at their workshops to increase revenue. This customer loyalty is key to maintaining and increasing long-term revenue. Hence, it is imperative for organizations to prioritize customer happiness as a critical factor that significantly impacts customer loyalty. Previous studies have established that customer satisfaction serves as a significant mediator in the association between brand image and customer loyalty. Numerous studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between levels of customer satisfaction and the influence of brand image on consumer loyalty. Therefore, it is crucial to link endeavors aimed at cultivating a favorable brand image with the objective of enhancing customer pleasure in order to strengthen consumer loyalty.

The results of this study also offer significant insights for organizations and future scholars to delve deeper into additional attributes that could potentially influence consumer loyalty. In tandem with the dimension of customer satisfaction, it is imperative to examine additional factors that may exert a significant impact on customer loyalty, hence warranting further inquiry. The results obtained from this study is anticipated to be a significant contribution to the field valuable benchmark for Auto 2000 and comparable businesses, assisting them in developing strategies to improve customer loyalty. The firm is expected to have a long-term benefit in terms of increased income as a result of improved client loyalty.

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