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Corporate Reputation, Salesperson Trustworthiness and Customer Loyalty in the Life Insurance Industry

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Abstract

This study analyses the effects of corporate reputation and trustworthiness in the salesperson on the customer loyalty of 215 German customers who obtained endowment insurance. We use a cross-sectional study design. Corporate reputation is captured by the rational attitude of competence and the emotional likeability of the insurer by customers. The results show that perceived likeability and trustworthiness in the salesperson both play an equally dominant role in customer satisfaction and loyalty followed by perceived core service quality. Surprisingly the competence level has no direct effect on customer loyalty. Our results show that a trustworthy salesperson can compensate for weaknesses in a company's perception of competence. Finally, the results suggest that life insurers' strategic management should focus on strong emotional bonds and the formation of a trustful sales force. Assistance services can offer customers an early positive product experience, usually within the year-long saving phase of a life insurance product. Our find-

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ings underscore the need for insurers to be perceived as innovative, fair, socially engaged, and being represented by a highly trusted salesperson to achieve high levels of customer loyalty.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Studie untersucht den Einfluss der Unternehmensreputation und der Vertrauenswürdigkeit des Verkäufers auf die Kundenloyalität von 215 deutschen Kunden, die eine Kapitallebensversicherung abgeschlossen haben. Es handelt sich um eine Querschnittsstudie. Die Unternehmensreputation wird durch die rationale Kompetenzbewertung und die empfundene Sympathie gegenüber dem Versicherer erfasst. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die wahrgenommene Sympathie sowie die Vertrauenswürdigkeit des Verkäufers den jeweils größten Einfluss auf die Kundenzufriedenheit und -loyalität haben, gefolgt von der empfundenen Kernservicequalität. Überraschenderweise hat das Kompetenzniveau keinen direkten Einfluss auf die Kundenloyalität. Unsere Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass ein vertrauenswürdiger Verkäufer Schwächen in der Kompetenzwahrnehmung eines Versicherungsunternehmens ausgleichen kann. Schließlich legen die Ergebnisse nahe, dass sich das strategische Management von Lebensversicherern auf den Aufbau einer stark emotionalen Bindung und den Aufbau eines vertrauenswürdigen Außendienstes konzentrieren sollte. Assistance Leistungen können den Kunden eine frühe positive Produkterfahrung bieten, üblicherweise in der vieljährigen Ansparphase eines Kapitallebensversicherungsprodukts. Unsere Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Notwendigkeit für Versicherer, als innovativ, fair und sozial engagiert wahrgenommen zu werden und von einem vertrauenswürdigen Außendienst repräsentiert zu werden, um eine hohe Kundenloyalität zu erreichen.

1. Introduction

Endowment insurance is a complex service product involving long-term contracts and is usually characterised by long-term periodic premium payments (Attar et al. 2023). Since it is relatively difficult for customers to recognise the benefits of this product and positive product experiences are limited during the savings phase, customers sometimes make ill-considered decisions about their life insurance. One such decision is to surrender the policy and switch from a loyal to a disloyal customer.

Periods of low or negative real interest rates, increasingly stringent regulatory requirements, and growing competition from digital fintech companies create a challenging market environment for endowment insurers (Berdin and Gründl 2015; Feodoria and Förstemann 2015; Koijen and Yogo 2022; Zetzsche et al. 2017). Therefore, in a highly competitive market environment for endowment insurers, it is extremely important to understand the factors that influence customers' corporate reputation perceptions so that they become and remain loyal clients.

Extensive empirical research has been conducted on customer loyalty in other industries (Attar et al. 2023; Fam et al. 2023; Hair et al. 2021; Picón-Berjoyo et al. 2016; Sarstedt et al. 2023); however, it has limited applicability to the insurance industry. This limited applicability is due to the special features of insurance products compared to other service products. In most cases, it takes a long time for customers to obtain a tangible positive product experience, because the saving phase usually spans years or even decades.

The literature on the insurance industry within the context of corporate reputation and its effects on customer loyalty includes studies on the influence of perceived switching costs on customer loyalty in Taiwan (Chen and Wang 2009), the link between customer satisfaction and loyalty in Mali (Youba 2018), and the influence of customer relationship management on customer loyalty in India and Sri Lanka (Andotra and Abrol 2016; Wijenayaka et al. 2015). Studies on mature insurance markets, such as those in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have not been conducted recently.

It is important for the management of life insurance companies to know which relationships within the conceptual model are significant and understand the relative dominance of competing effects for long-term success in a highly competitive insurance product market (Harun et al. 2018; Milena Nikolić et al. 2023). As the characteristics of insurance products are different from those of other consumer products or even other types of service products, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap. In addition, according to Minta (2018), the trustworthiness of the salesperson plays an important role in understanding customer loyalty in the insurance industry.

This study examines the long-term aspects of endowment insurance, the long-term consumption renunciation of an endowment policy, and the factors that foster a loyal customer base. In this context, our study considers the influence of a life insurer's corporate reputation as an intangible asset of an organisation and trustworthiness in the salesperson on customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty.

As part of our analysis, the consumer loyalty model developed by Eberl (2010), which has been validated numerous times in the literature on other industries (Hair et al. 2022; Sarstedt et al. 2023; Schloderer et al. 2014), is applied to the life insurance industry in the German market. Following Sarstedt et al. (Sarstedt et al. 2023), we extend the model to include the variable of trust. In contrast to Sarstedt et al., we do not measure trust within the firm as a whole, but integrate the variable of the trustworthiness of the salesperson, which, according to the literature (Machado et al. 2019; Minta 2018; Tosun 2020), plays an important role in endowment insurance products.

The model is estimated using partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al. 2018; Lohmöller 1989; Sarstedt et al. 2017). PLS-

SEM is a standard approach for complex causal models in the social sciences, as evidenced by the exponentially growing number of PLS-SEM citations in the literature (Hair et al. 2022). Estimation using the PLS-SEM model is followed by evaluations of the measurement model, structural model, predictive power of the model, and level of explanation, as well as an analysis of the mediation, the moderation and overall effect sizes.

The following section discusses the theoretical arguments of the customer loyalty model and its expansion by the moderating role of trustworthiness in the salesperson. The empirical framework and testing procedures are presented in the third section, and the results are presented in the fourth section. The fifth section discusses the results. The last section summarises the results and presents the implications of the findings and the study's limitations.

2. Conceptual Background

Our study conceptually refers to the corporate reputation model originally presented by Eberl (2010), which aims to explain the effects of corporate reputation on customer satisfaction (CUSA), and ultimately, on customer loyalty (CUSL). Corporate reputation represents a company's overall evaluation by stakeholders (Helm et al. 2010) and comprises two dimensions according to the literature (Eberl and Schwaiger 2005; Sarstedt et al. 2023; Schwaiger 2004). The first dimension captures the cognitive and rational evaluation of a company, and the corresponding construct is the company's perceived competence level (COMP). The second dimension captures the affective judgements that determine a company's perceived likeability (LIKE). This two-dimensional reputation measure has been validated in various industries and countries (Eberl and Schwaiger 2005; Raithel and Schwaiger 2015; Sarstedt et al. 2023; Schloderer et al. 2014). The conceptual framework of the model and postulated hypotheses are presented in Figure 1.

Corporate reputation is assumed to have a positive impact on both customer satisfaction and loyalty (Agyei et al. 2022; Ling et al. 2016; Sarstedt et al. 2014). Furthermore, it is generally accepted that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty (Albtoosh et al. 2022; Evanschitzky et al. 2022; Schirmer et al. 2018). Therefore, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}: Competence has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction.

H_{1b}: Likeability has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction.

H_{2a}: Competence has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty.

H_{2b}: Likeability has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty.

H_3: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty.

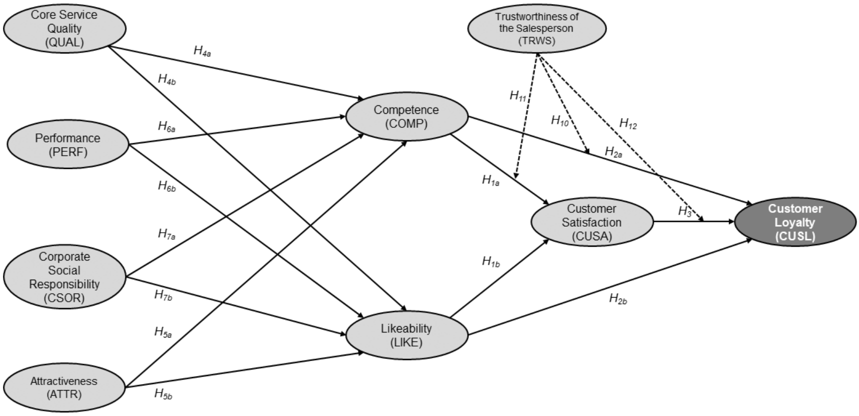

Fig. 1: Overview of the Conceptual Framework Model

Schwaiger (2004) identified four exogenous constructs that represent important sources of the two dimensions of corporate reputation: 1) the core quality of a company's products and services (QUAL), including the quality of customer orientation; 2) perceived performance (PERF); 3) the company's corporate social responsibility (CSOR); and 4) the company's general attractiveness (ATTR). These important relationships have been proven to be valid in various studies but have not yet been tested for the insurance sector (Bruno et al. 2015; Dowling 2016).

Based on empirical findings (Hair et al. 2022; Maladi et al. 2019; Sarstedt et al. 2023; Srivastava and Sharma 2013), in line with Schwaiger (2004), we postulate that both perceived core service quality and attractiveness have a positive impact on the competence level and the likeability of an insurance product. Therefore, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H_{4a}: Core service quality has a significant positive impact on competence.

H_{4b}: Core service quality has a significant positive impact on likeability.

H_{5a}: Attractiveness has a significant positive impact on competence.

H_{5b}: Attractiveness has a significant positive impact on likeability.

Mixed empirical results are available on the relationship between performance and corporate reputation. Most studies show that perceived performance has a positive impact on the competence level and a negative impact on the insurer's likeability as perceived by customers (Latif et al. 2020; Raithel and Schwaiger 2015; Sarstedt et al. 2014; Schwaiger 2004). We test this in our study by proposing the following hypotheses:

H_{6a}: Performance has a significant positive impact on competence.

H_{6b}: Performance has a significant negative impact on likeability.

The customer social responsibility literature also discusses mixed effects on corporate reputation. A positive impact is documented between customer social responsibility and likeability and a positive impact on the perceived competence level (Attar et al. 2023; Dwertmann et al. 2023; Latif et al. 2020; Melo and Garrido-Morgado 2012; Xuetong et al. 2023); therefore, the following hypotheses are posited:

H_{7a}: Corporate social responsibility has a significant positive impact on competence.

H_{7b}: Corporate social responsibility has a significant positive impact on likeability.

According to Hair et al. (2022), customer satisfaction may fully mediate the relationship between competence and customer loyalty. In this vein, based on empirical evidence from corporate reputation modelling in other industries (Latif et al. 2020; Picón et al. 2014; Picón-Berjoyo et al. 2016), we expect customer satisfaction to mediate the relationships between competence and customer loyalty and likeability and customer loyalty. Ismail et al. (2021) discuss that the empirical evidence from other sectors may be easily extended to the insurance sector. Hence, we propose the following final hypotheses:

H_8: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between competence and customer loyalty.

H_9: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between likeability and customer loyalty.

As shown by Sarstedt et al. (2023), there is evidence that the construct of trust is a consequence of competence and directly affects customer satisfaction and ultimately customer loyalty. In contrast to Sarstedt et al., we do not measure trust within the firm as a whole, but integrate the variable of the trustworthiness of the salesperson, which, according to the literature (Machado et al. 2019; Minta 2018; Tosun 2020), plays an important role in endowment insurance products. Minta (2018) and Talwar and Ali (2017) show that overall trust within an insurance company could also be modelled as a moderator between the linkage of satisfaction and customer loyalty. All the variables integrated so far in our model are related to the company level. Since the goal of this research is to show the explicit impact of trust within the salesperson, which by definition is not a corporate level variable, on customer loyalty, we don't model this impact directly within the model, but as a moderating effect of the individual circumstances between the customer and the salesperson.

Based on the findings in the literature discussed, we propose that the effect of life insurers' overall level of competence in the model on customer satisfaction and loyalty is moderated by the level of trustworthiness of the salesperson. Furthermore, salesperson trustworthiness also moderates the direct relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

H_{10}: Trustworthiness of the Salesperson moderates the relationship between competence and customer loyalty.

H_{11}: Trustworthiness of the Salesperson moderates the relationship between competence and customer satisfaction.

H_{12}: Trustworthiness of the Salesperson moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

3. Empirical Setting and Testing Procedure

This study examines customers' loyalty to life insurance companies to empirically test the established research hypotheses and understand the relative importance and impact of certain constructs. Customer loyalty is important because it is not only relevant for life insurers to understand why customers differ in their loyalty but also allows for the examination of situational differences in the relationships between the relevant constructs and customer loyalty according to the heavily cited article of Dick and Basu (1994) and Sarsted et al. (2023). This model could also be applied to other insurance products.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

This independent study is a non-interventional survey. Before the participants took part in the survey, we informed them in detail about the scope of the survey in the written preamble and the use of anonymous data, voluntary nature of participation, possibility of opting out at any time, and compatibility of the survey with European data protection laws, thus obtaining informed consent.

3.2 Sample and Data Description

The research design was based on a non-representative sample of 215 individuals with endowment insurance in Germany. Samples were collected between July 2023 and September 2023. Data were collected partly through an online survey and partly offline via tablets. Selection bias cannot be ruled out, especially in the selection of offline respondents who were randomly approached and asked to participate in the survey. This process ensured the anonymity of the participants, as no IP data, names, addresses, or dates of birth were collected.

Table 1

Descriptive overview of the sample

	Overall Sample	**LOYAL**	**DISLOYAL**
Total sample size	215	47,0 %	53,0 %
Gender (M/F)			
M	118	43,2 %	56,8 %
F	97	51,5 %	48,5 %
Age (years)			
< 40 years	57	56,1 %	43,9 %
40 – 54 years	81	43,2 %	56,8 %
55 – 69 years	72	45,8 %	54,2 %
≥ 70 years	5	20,0 %	80,0 %
Available monthly income after taxes			
< 1,000 €	3	33,3 %	66,7 %
1,000 – 1,999 €	48	56,3 %	43,8 %
2,000 – 2,999 €	52	30,8 %	69,2 %
3,000 – 4,999 €	56	53,6 %	46,4 %
≥ 5,000 €	35	62,9 %	37,1 %
Customer duration in years			
<= 1.00 year	7	71,4 %	28,6 %
1.01 – 3.00 years	26	42,3 %	57,7 %
3.01 – 5.00 years	20	30,0 %	70,0 %
5.01 – 10.00 years	42	50,0 %	50,0 %
> 10 years	120	48,3 %	51,7 %

Notes: Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample Comparing above median with below median loyalty customers; Abbreviations: M, Male; F, Female; LOYAL, above median loyalty customers; DISLOYAL, below median loyalty customers

To assess possible bias in this study, it is important to compare the demographic variables of age and gender between the sample and the German population. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 81 years. The average age was 47.7 years, compared with an average age of approximately 45.6 years in the German population. Regarding gender, 54.8 % of the respondents were men, compared to 49.3 % in the German population. Table 1 provides an overview of the general structure of our sample.

To ensure the generalisability of our results, aspects such as different population characteristics, cultural factors, socioeconomic status, and education levels of the subjects in other countries, as well as different characteristics of the state pension insurance systems, should be considered (King-Shier et al. 2017); however, this was not within the scope of our model.

3.3 Measures

We adapted established and validated tools to measure customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, likeability, competence, core service quality, corporate performance, attractiveness, corporate social responsibility, and trustworthiness in the salesperson. Table 2 shows all constructs and their respective measures. All specifications of the reflective and formative measurement instruments used in this study, with the exception of trustworthiness in the salesperson, were based on Schwaiger (2004) and Eberl and Schwaiger (2005) and were collected on a seven-point Likert scale. Salesperson trustworthiness is based on the established and validated Crosby et al. (1990) scale.

The four constructs of customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, competence, likeability and trustworthiness in the salesperson on the right-hand side of the model are measured reflectively. Customer loyalty, competence, sympathy and trustworthiness are three-item constructs, while customer satisfaction is measured using a single item.

The constructs on the left-hand side of the model are measured using formative measurement models. Core service quality is measured using eight items, performance and corporate social responsibility using five items each, and attractiveness using a reflective measurement model with four items.

3.4 Testing Procedure

We applied PLS-SEM to evaluate the hypotheses using the SmartPLS 4 (SmartPLS 4, Ringle, C. M.; Wende, S.; Becker, J.-M. 2023) software. First, the reliability and validity of the instruments were evaluated. Second, structural equation model analysis was conducted to test the direct effects of hypotheses $H_1 - H_9$. Third, a mediation analysis was conducted to confirm hypotheses H_8 and H_9 and forth a moderation analysis to investigate $H_{10} - H_{12}$.

PLS-SEM is a well-established research method for estimating complex cause-effect relationship models. It is particularly suitable for conducting theory development and testing at an early stage and enables the investigation of constructs and relationships within complex structural equation models. Compared with other studies, in this study, the nine-construct model explains customer loyalty from a more holistic perspective. PLS-SEM is characterised by the following elements that are relevant to our study: achieving high statistical power with small sample sizes, making no assumptions about the distribution of variables as it is a non-parametric method, incorporating reflective and formative measurement models, aiming to maximise the amount of explained variance in the dependent variables (R^2), and testing the predictive power of the model (Hair et al. 2022). PLS-SEM is a standard approach for complex causal models in the social sciences, as evidenced by the exponentially growing number of PLS-SEM citations in the literature (Hair et al. 2022).

The PLS-SEM guidelines suggest that the minimum sample size should be the maximum number of arrows pointing to a construct, multiplied by 10. In our study, this value was calculated to be 8 × 10, and the sample size of $n = 215$ was well above this critical threshold. Alternatively, the sample size requirement for a calculation according to Cohen (1992) for a multiple ordinary least squares regression is an effect size of .25, an assumed significance level of 5 %, and a test strength of .95 for $n = 164$. Our sample met this requirement.

4. Results

The structural equation model shown in Figure 2 is an empirical evaluation of the hypotheses. In the following sections, the reflective and formative measurement models are presented. Next, the direct effects of the latent variables and the predictive nature of the overall model are presented. Finally, the indirect, mediating, moderating, and total effects are examined.

4.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

As shown in Table 2, the reliabilities (e.g. indicator reliabilities of the construct measures and internal consistency) and factor loadings for all reflective constructs (COMP, LIKE, CUSA, CUSL, TRWS) were above .700, ensuring acceptance of convergent validity (Chin W. W. 2010). Our analysis reveals that the values for Cronbach's α, composite reliability, and average variance extracted were above the acceptable thresholds of .700, .700, and .500, respectively (Fornell C. and Larcker D. F. 1981; Hair et al. 2022).

Table 2

Measurement model results

Item							
Reflective Measures		**Loading**	**Composite Reliability**	**AVE**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Mean**	**Standard-Deviation**
COMP	As far as I know, [the company] is recognised worldwide.	0,753 ***	0,791	0,632	0,723	1,274	1,372
	[The company] is a top competitor in the market.	0,769 ***				1,195	1,478
	I believe that [the company] performs at a premium level.	0,860 ***				1,451	1,352
CUSA	If you consider your experiences with [the company], how satisfied are you with [the company]?	1,000				1,735	1,401
CUSL	I would recommend [the company] to friends and relatives.	0,894 ***	0,856	0,763	0,845	1,656	1,448
	I will continue to be a customer of [the company] in the future.	0,833 ***				1,772	1,662
	If I had to choose again, I would choose [the company] as my mobile phone service provider.	0,892 ***				1,335	1,693
LIKE	[The company] is a company that I can better identify with than other companies.	0,871 ***	0,868	0,782	0,861	0,902	1,764
	Compared with other companies, I would miss [the company] the most if it no longer existed.	0,900 ***				0,572	1,930
	I regard [the company] as a likeable company.	0,882 ***				1,302	1,487

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(Table 2 continued)

	Item						
Reflective Measures		**Loading**	**Composite Reliability**	**AVE**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Mean**	**Standard-Deviation**
TRWS	I suspect that my agent has sometimes withheld certain pieces of critical information that might have affected my decision-making	0,738 ***	0,847	0,649	0,729	0,935	1,829
	My agent puts the customer's interests before his/her own.	0,786 ***				0,833	1,791
	My agent is trustworthy.	0,886 ***				1,540	1,584
Formative Measures		**Outer weights**	**VIF**				
ATTR	I like the physical appearance of [the company] (company, buildings, shops, etc.).	0,473 ***	2,412			1,363	1,353
	I like the digital appearance of [the company] (homepage, social media, etc.).	0,172 *	2,214			1,079	1,423
	[The company] is successful in attracting high-quality employees.	0,324 ***	1,550			0,874	1,462
	I could see myself working at [the company].	0,273 ***	1,368			–0,512	2,113
CSOR	[The company] has a fair attitude towards competitors.	0,499 ***	1,633			1,149	1,335
	[The company] is not only concerned about profits.	0,164 *	1,680			0,600	1,616
	[The company] behaves in a socially conscious way.	0,450 ***	2,124			0,898	1,443
	[The company] is forthright in giving information to the public.	0,030	1,024			–0,553	1,735

	[The company] is concerned about the preservation of the environment.	0,087	1,817	0,716	1,250
PERF	[The company] is an economically stable company.	0,309 ***	2,026	1,795	1,106
	The business risk for [the company] is modest compared to that for its competitors.	0,113	2,084	1,465	1,238
	[The company] is a very well-managed company.	0,409 ***	2,333	1,405	1,261
	[The company] has growth potential.	0,121	2,678	1,293	1,368
	[The company] has a clear vision about its future.	0,258 ***	2,049	1,274	1,376
QUAL	[The company]'s products/services offer good value for money.	0,227 ***	1,851	1,600	1,380
	Customer concerns are held in high regard at [the company].	0,204 ***	2,574	1,386	1,426
	The products/services offered by [the company] are of high quality.	0,127 *	2,929	1,605	1,436
	[The company] is trustworthy.	0,094	2,689	1,698	1,462
	[The company] is an innovator, rather than an imitator with respect to [the industry].	0,209 ***	1,332	0,856	1,473
	The services [the company] offers are good.	0,092	2,650	1,526	1,374
	[The company] is a reliable partner for customers.	0,160 **	2,514	1,688	1,401
	I have a lot of respect for [the company].	0,208 ***	1,543	0,693	1,481

Notes: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2022) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. AVE: average variance extracted; VIF: variance inflation factor; ATTR: attractiveness; COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; LIKE: likeability; PERF: performance; QUAL: core service quality; CSOR: corporate social responsibility; TRWS: Trustworthiness in the salesperson.

We used the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al. 2015; Roemer et al. 2021) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al. 2022) to assess the constructs' discriminant validity. Table 3 shows that all HTMT values were below the critical value of .850, which confirms the discriminant validity between constructs (Roemer et al. 2021). The Fornell–Larcker criterion also fit all the reflective constructs in this study.

Table 3

Discriminant validity

Construct	COMP	CUSA	CUSL	LIKE	TRWS
COMP	0,795	0,576***	0,632***	0,587***	0,655***
CUSA	0,533	1,000	0,808***	0,685***	0,807***
CUSL	0,533	0,746	0,873	0,817***	0,844***
LIKE	0,511	0,640	0,708	0,884	0,763***
TRWS	0,549	0,702	0,678	0,613	0,806

Notes: Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations; We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2022) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; LIKE: likeability

Formative measurement models were assessed in different ways. Here, we investigate the significance of the outer weight estimators and the collinearity of the different indicators (Hair et al. 2022). The results for the four formative constructs, QUAL, PERF, CSOR, and ATTR, show that most items were significant, and collinearity, measured by the variance inflation factor (VIF), was below the critical value of three (Diamantopoulos 2006). The items were not significant, even though they remained within the measurement models, because we cannot exclude formative items without impacting the content of the construct.

4.2 Structural Model Evaluation

The structural equation model analytics was divided into four steps. First, we discuss the predictive power and direct effects; second, mediation; third moderation, and finally, the total effects within the model.

4.2.1 Predictive Power and Direct Effects

Table 4 provides an overview of the relationships within the structural model. All the direct relationship hypotheses, except of the path-coefficients for hypothesis H_{2a}, H_{5a}, H_{5b}, and H_{7a} were significant. Customer loyalty had the strongest direct relationship with consumer satisfaction (.448), followed by likeability (.335). Both influencing factors were highly significant, supporting hypotheses H_3 and H_{2b}. The direct influence of an insurance company's perceived competence level on customer loyalty postulated in hypothesis H_{2a} was not significantly different from 0, with a path value of .049. Therefore, we reject this hypothesis. The four constructs, CUSA, LIKE, COMP, and TRWS explained, in terms of R^2, 68.4 % of the variance in the target construct of consumer loyalty, which, according to Bliemel et al. (2005), indicates a moderate to substantial degree of explanation (Figure 2).

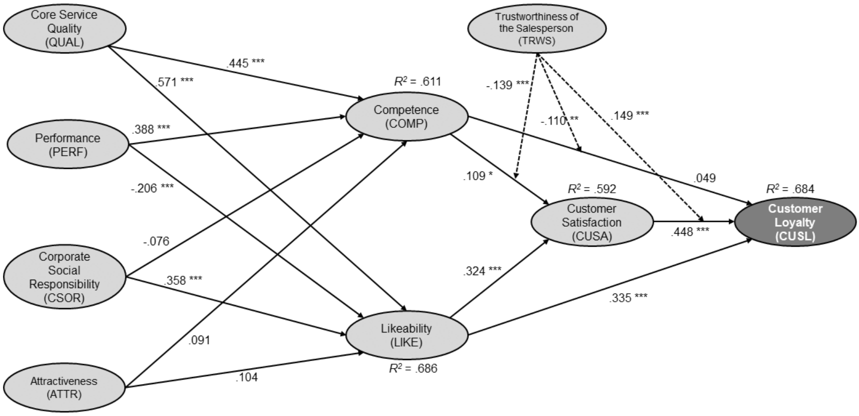
The predictive power of the structural model was examined using Q^2 *statistics*, and the effect sizes of the individual construct dependencies on each other were determined using the effect sizes f^2 and q^2 (Hair et al. 2022), which are shown in Table 4. Finally, discriminant validity and model fit were assessed using the standardised root-mean-square residual (SRMR) criterion (Henseler et al. 2015).

Table 4

Measurement model results: direct effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	Path Coefficient	Bias Corrected 95 % Confidence Interval	f^2	q^2
H_{5a}	ATTR -> COMP	0,091	[−0,073; 0,283]	0,017	Not defined
H_{5b}	ATTR -> LIKE	0,105	[−0,017; 0,236]	0,021	Not defined
H_{1a}	COMP -> CUSA	0,109 *	[−0.002; 0,224]	0,024	0,193
H_{2a}	COMP -> CUSL	0,049	[−0,057; 0,152]	0,011	0,101
H_{7a}	CSOR -> COMP	−0,076	[−0,250; 0,089]	0,012	Not defined
H_{7b}	CSOR -> LIKE	0,358 ***	[0,204; 0,502]	0,151	0,111
H_3	CUSA -> CUSL	0,448 ***	[0,267; 0,611]	0,225	0,034
H_{1b}	LIKE -> CUSA	0,324 ***	[0,195; 0,451]	0,152	0,158
H_{2b}	LIKE -> CUSL	0,335 ***	[0,216; 0,447]	0,186	0,249
H_{6a}	PERF -> COMP	0,388 ***	[0,228; 0,531]	0,209	0,129
H_{6b}	PERF -> LIKE	−0,206 ***	[−0,346; −0,088]	0,069	0,023
H_{4a}	QUAL -> COMP	0,445 ***	[0,262; 0,614]	0,149	0,115
H_{4b}	QUAL -> LIKE	0,571 ***	[0,401; 0,735]	0,285	0,257

Notes: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2022) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. ATTR: attractiveness; COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; LIKE: likeability; PERF: performance; QUAL: core service quality; CSOR: corporate social responsibility



Note: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al., 2022) with 10,000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients; ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10.

Fig. 2: Partial least square path model and results

The blind-folding procedure was performed with a predefined distance of seven for a cross-validated redundancy check to determine the Q^2 *statistics* (Hair et al. 2019) for all endogenous constructs. The Q^2 *statistic* of customer loyalty was significantly above 0 at .622, which was also true for all other endogenous constructs COMP (.565), CUSA (.581), and LIKE (.657). These results indicate the prognostic relevance of our model.

The effect sizes f^2 and q^2 provide information on the contribution of an exogenous construct to the share of explained variance of the downstream endogenous construct. Following Hair et al. (2022), the values of .020, .150, and .350 suggested small, medium, and large effects for f^2 and small, medium, and high predictive relevance for q^2, respectively. The results in Table 4 are consistent with the assumptions and rejections of the research hypotheses presented at the beginning of this section. For all non-significant path dependencies, no or weak effects were observed. small to strong effects and forecast relevance were determined for all significant structural model paths. The ranks of the PLS path-coefficients and effect sizes f^2 and q^2 largely coincided, which also shows the predictive power of the model.

To determine the overall fit of the model, we used SRMR values. According to Hu and Bentler (1998), a number between 0 and .080 indicates a good model fit. Our model had an SRMR value of 0.072, indicating a good overall fit.

According to the results, likeability (.324) had a direct influence almost triple as strong on customer satisfaction than that of the perceived competence level (.109). In total, both upstream constructs and the moderating effect of trustworthiness in the salesperson explained 59.2 % of the variance in customer satisfaction, which is known to have the strongest direct effect on customer loyalty.

To improve customer loyalty, sympathy appeared to be more relevant to success than the competence of a life insurance company. Likeability, in turn, was most strongly influenced by the perceived core service quality of the insurance company (.571), followed by corporate social responsibility (.358), perceived corporate performance (–.206), and perceived attractiveness (.104), whereby, interestingly, no significance could be proven for the latter dependency. The four exogenous constructs of core service quality, performance, corporate social responsibility, and attractiveness explained 68.6 % of the variance in perceived likeability.

Perceived level of competence can be described as 61.1 % based on the constructs of core service quality, performance, corporate social responsibility, and attractiveness. The dominance of the influencing factor core service quality (.445) was not as strong as it was in explaining the emergence of likeability. The second strongest influence came from perceived corporate performance (.388), followed by the two non-significant influences of perceived attractiveness (.091) and corporate social responsibility (–.076).

In summary, of the four exogenous constructs on the left-hand side of the structural model, core service quality of an endowment life insurance company as perceived by customers had the strongest cumulative direct influence on the two downstream constructs of competence and likeability. These constructs are central to our model, since in combination, they represent the overall corporate reputation of the insurer. However, the influence of perceived company performance or as we can call it entrepreneurial success was diametrically opposed. Entrepreneurial success had a strong positive effect on perceived competence and a medium negative effect on sympathy towards life insurers. However, sympathy had significantly greater leverage regarding the target construct of customer loyalty than perceived competence.

Corporate social responsibility had an exclusively positive effect on perceived likeability and no influence on perceived competence. However, the life insurer's perceived attractiveness had no effect on either of the two downstream constructs of likeability or competence and, thus, had no relevance whatsoever. Figure 2 provides an overview of the direct effects and their significance in the structural model.

4.2.2 Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted to assess the mediating role of customer satisfaction. Table 5 presents the results thereof. A significant full mediation of customer satisfaction in the relationship between perceived competence and consumer loyalty was observed. The indirect effect of competence via customer satisfaction on customer loyalty (.049) was significant at a 10 % level of significance, whereas its direct effect on customer loyalty, as described earlier, was not (.049) significant at all. Thus, customer satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between competence and customer loyalty.

Other mediating circumstances are also reported regarding the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between likeability and customer loyalty. The indirect effect was .145, and the direct effect between likeability and customer loyalty was .335, which was stronger than the indirect effect. Both the effects were statistically significant. Consequently, the variance accounted for (VAF) in this case was 38.8 %, which, combined with the significance of the direct and indirect effects, indicates a strong mediating role of customer satisfaction. According to Hair et al. (2022), for partial mediation, VAF should be greater than the critical value of 20.0 %, which was fulfilled in this case.

Table 5

Measurement model results: mediation

Hypotheses	Effect	Relationships	Path Coefficient	Bias Corrected 95 % Confidence Interval	VAF	Mediation
	Total effect	COMP -> CUSL	0,097 *	[–0,002; 0,224]		
H_8	Direct effect	COMP -> CUSL	0,049	[–0,057; 0,152]		
	Indirect effect	COMP -> CUSA -> CUSL	0,049 *	[0,004; 0,117]	0,505	Full
	Total effect	LIKE -> CUSL	0,480 ***	[0,378; 0,587]		
H_9	Direct effect	LIKE -> CUSL	0,335 ***	[0,216; 0,477]		
	Indirect effect	LIKE -> CUSA -> CUSL	0,145 ***	[0,066; 0,248]	0,302	Partial

Notes: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2017) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. VAF: variance accounted for; COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; LIKE: likeability, TRWS: trustworthiness in the salesperson

4.2.3 Moderation Analysis

A moderation analysis was steered to examine the moderating effect of trustworthiness in the salesperson (TRWS). All three moderating effects were significant, so hypotheses H_{10} – H_{12} were supported by our results shown in Table 6.

Hypothesis H_{10} states that as TRWS improves, the relationship between competence and customer loyalty will diminish. The results from Table 6 support this assumption. So trustworthiness in the salesperson has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between competence and customer loyalty (–.110). Hypothesis H_{11} posits that as trustworthiness increases, the relationship between competence and customer satisfaction will reduce. The measured moderating effect for this relationship of –.139, being highly significant supports the assumed direction of effects.

Table 6

Measurement model results: moderating effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	Path Coefficient	Bias Corrected 95 % Confidence Interval	f^2	q^2
H_{11}	TRWS x COMP -> CUSA	–0,139 ***	[–0,231; –0,045]	0,049	0,165
H_{10}	TRWS x COMP -> CUSL	–0,110 **	[–0,204; –0,017]	0,031	0,103
H_{12}	TRWS x CUSA -> CUSL	0,149 ***	[0,050; 0,261]	0,049	0,103

Notes: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2022) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; TRWS: trustworthiness in the salesperson

Hypothesis H_{12} postulates that as trustworthiness increases, the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty will diminish. However, inspecting the coefficient of the interaction term a positive and significant coefficient of .149 was found. Therefore, hypothesis H_{12} is not supported in this study.

It is worth noting that the coefficients of the main effects between competence and satisfaction in a model without moderation remain significant and have the same direction when the interaction terms are added. In other words, H_{1a} and H_3 are also supported in this moderation analysis. The same is true for the rejection of hypothesis H_{2a}, which is rejected in the moderation model presented but also in a model without moderation.

Figure 3 provides a more detailed look at the interactions discussed above. The left graph nicely shows that the perception of a company's overall level of competence becomes irrelevant to customer loyalty when there is a perceived trusting relationship between the customer and the salesperson. The middle graph in Figure 3 shows that the same is true for the relationship between the level of competence and customer satisfaction. Again, a high level of trustworthiness can easily compensate for a customer's perception of a low level of overall competence. For life insurers, who know they have a competency issue in the eyes of customers, this trustworthiness aspect becomes even more critical to keeping customers with the company. Our results show that a trustworthy sales force is a major competitive advantage in keeping endowment insurance customers loyal to the company.

The moderating effect of trustworthiness on the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is shown in Figure 3 on the right. As discussed, a diminishing impact of trustworthiness was not observed. When customer satisfaction is low, the level of trustworthiness does not matter. Customer loyalty is at the same level, which is relatively low. In the satisfied customer segment, customers who report a high level of trustworthiness in a life insurance salesperson are even more loyal than customers who report a lower level of trustworthiness. In retrospect, this is not so surprising, since after estimating the model we know that customer satisfaction is the strongest predictor of customer loyalty and that the relationship between competence and customer loyalty itself is significantly moderated by trustworthiness.

In summary, in all three graphs in Figure 3, we clearly observe that the lines of high trustworthiness in the salesperson bucket are at higher levels than those in the low trustworthiness bucket. This fact highlights the importance of a trustworthy sales force as a competitive advantage for a life insurance company. A trustworthy sales force can compensate for problems on other constructs within the model, which nicely highlights its overall importance.

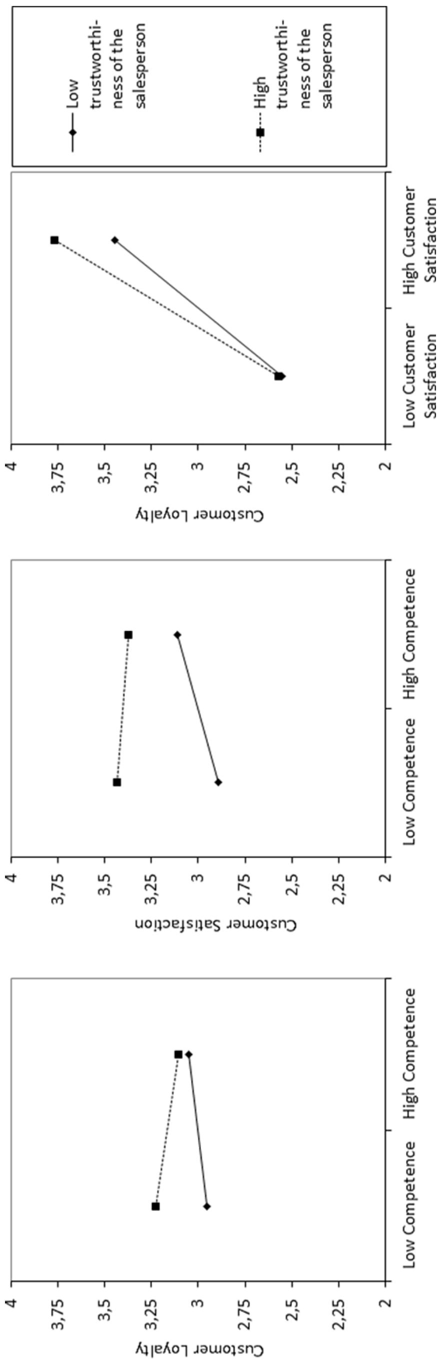


Fig. 3: Moderation of trustworthiness of the salesperson

4.2.4 Total Effects

In this section the factors that had the strongest overall effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty were examined. The total effects on customer satisfaction were examined because this construct had the strongest direct effect on customer loyalty. The total effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effects and is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Measurement model results: total effects

Effect	Relationships	Path Coefficient	Bias Corrected 95 % Confidence Interval	VAF
Customer loyalty	LIKE -> CUSL	0,480 ***	[0,378; 0,587]	24 %
	CUSA -> CUSL	0,448 ***	[0,267; 0,611]	23 %
	TRWS -> CUSL	0,350 ***	[0,222; 0,461]	18 %
	QUAL -> CUSL	0,317 ***	[0,222; 0,424]	16 %
	CSOR -> CUSL	0,165 ***	[0,094; 0,249]	8 %
	COMP -> CUSL	0,097 *	[−0,015; 0,213]	5 %
	ATTR -> CUSL	0,059 *	[0,001; 0,127]	3 %
	PERF -> CUSL	−0,061	[−0,151; 0,005]	3 %
Customer satisfaction	TRWS -> CUSA	0,406 ***	[0,255; 0,551]	33 %
	LIKE -> CUSA	0,324 ***	[0,195; 0,451]	26 %
	QUAL -> CUSA	0,233 ***	[0,141; 0,340]	19 %
	COMP -> CUSA	0,109 *	[−0,002; 0,224]	9 %
	CSOR -> CUSA	0,108 ***	[0,047; 0,184]	9 %
	ATTR -> CUSA	0,044 *	[0,002; 0,096]	4 %
	PERF -> CUSA	−0,025	[−0,106; 0,041]	2 %

Notes: We used a bootstrapping routine (Hair et al. 2022) with 10.000 subsamples, 215 observations per subsample, and a no sign change option to determine the significance of the path coefficients. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10. VAF: variance accounted for; ATTR: attractiveness; COMP: competence; CUSA: customer satisfaction; CUSL: customer loyalty; LIKE: likeability; PERF: performance; QUAL: core service quality; CSOR: corporate social responsibility, TRWS: trustworthiness in the salesperson

Trustworthiness in the salesperson had the strongest total effect on customer satisfaction (.406), followed by likeability (.324), and core service quality (.233). The three explained 77 % of the variance accounted for (VAF) of customer satisfaction, which is statistically significant. Trustworthiness alone explains one-third of the variance in customer satisfaction, revealing the strong leverage effect of the quality of a trustworthy interaction between the sales representative and the customer. Interestingly, perceived competence (.109) was ranked only fourth, although it is located between the quality and target constructs within our structural model. The total effect of competence on customer satisfaction interestingly was not significant. This finding highlights the considerable influence of the perceived quality of a life insurance company's core services on customer satisfaction in a first step with the framework model. In our model, likeability dominated competence in achieving high customer loyalty in the German life insurance market. Competence accounted for 9 % of the VAF, where likeability alone enclosed 26 %. The fifth most important parameter influencing customer satisfaction was corporate social responsibility (.108) followed by attractiveness (.044) and corporate performance (–.025). Attractiveness and performance had no significant total effects on customer satisfaction. The positive and negative direct effects emanating from the business success construct offset each other to a net-zero effect on customer satisfaction.

The total effects on customer loyalty to life insurers in Germany were clearly shaped by perceived likeability towards the life insurer (.480) and customer satisfaction (.448). Both accounted for each approximately one-fourth of the VAF for customer loyalty. Trustworthiness in the salesperson (.350) and perceived core service quality (.317) each accounted for just under 20 % of the VAF. Corporate social responsibility had an overall effect size of .165 and 8 % VAF. Perceived competence, a fundamentally important and highly regarded construct in marketing, had a surprisingly low overall weight in explaining customer loyalty in the German life insurance market, with an insignificant total effect of only .097 and 5 % VAF. Attractiveness and corporate performance did not play a relevant role in customer loyalty, with effects of .059 and –.061 and VAF values of 3 % each, respectively. The overall effects of corporate performance and attractiveness on customer loyalty were not significant.

5. Discussion

Customer satisfaction is an important determinant of customer loyalty in the service context. Recent studies have investigated how corporate reputation influences the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Maladi et al. 2019; Özer et al. 2013). To cover corporate reputation, we referred to a two-fold approach in our study, which posits that corporate reputation can be split into the facets of perceived competence, as a rational evaluation parameter, and likeability, as an emotional attachment to a company (Eberl 2010; Sarstedt et al. 2023; Damberg et al. 2023). Therefore, we focused on competence and sympathy as direct factors that both influence customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The results clearly show that sympathy towards a life insurance company is the key trigger of the two facets for customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty. Higher levels of sympathy lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyal customers.

Comparing our results with recent findings for the banking sector in a German-Chinese study by Damberg et al. (2023), the competence of a life insurance company plays a subordinate role in achieving customer loyalty. This is surprising because both industries have a financial service type of product, but within the insurance market, competence is far outweighed by the role of likeability. Damberg et al. (2023) report a significant path value of likability that is twice as strong as the also significant weight of competence in explaining a loyalty type construct called sustained customer satisfaction. For the insurance industry the relative importance between likeability and competence to explain customer loyalty is rather four to one and not two to one.

Furthermore, competence only indirectly affects customer loyalty and is fully mediated by customer satisfaction, which is important for insurance company managers to consider. However, a direct effect of perceived competence on customer loyalty could not be demonstrated. Competence does not directly influence loyalty, it only directly influences customer satisfaction, which then influences loyalty.

Therefore, in complex service contexts generally associated with considerable purchase uncertainty, such as in the life insurance market, it is more business critical to generate customer sympathy than perceived competence, which is in line with findings from Agyen et al. (2022), Albtoosh et al. (2022), Evanschitzky et al. (2022), and Schirmer et al. (2018). According to Witkowska et al. (2021), this may also be due to the fact that it is difficult for customers to determine the quality of the insurance product, making it much more difficult to understand the level of competence of a life insurer.

Another important takeaway for life insurance management was the tremendous influence that a trustworthy salesperson has on customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty. Interestingly, we show through our moderation analysis that the level of trustworthiness can easily compensate for a customer's perception of a low level of overall competence. These findings underscore the importance of the strategic role of salespeople in developing customer satisfaction and loyalty throughout the relationship lifecycle, as Jap (2001) nicely pointed out already twenty years ago. For life insurers who know they have a competency problem, salespersons' trustworthiness becomes an even more critical trigger for customer retention. Our results highlight the strategic importance of a trustworthy sales force as a competitive advantage for a life insurance company, in line with Minta (2018), Tosun (2020), and Machado et al. (2019).

The development of customer satisfaction follows a pattern similar to that of customer loyalty. This is strongly characterised by likeability towards the insurer, with the additional moderately positive direct effects of perceived competence. It is important for the strategic management of life insurance companies to understand that customers become satisfied and loyal primarily through a strong emotional bond and only secondarily through the rationally perceived competence of the life insurer. According to our findings, this emotional bond is created by a trustworthy salesperson and by the company's overall likeability. As customer satisfaction is also primarily based on likeability and only secondarily on competence, in line with Damberg et al. (2023), and Otto et al. (2020) a deeper understanding of how likeability for a life insurer develops is central to successful strategic market development.

Consistent with other industries (Dwertmann et al. 2023; Hair et al. 2022; Raithel and Schwaiger 2015; Saari et al. 2021), in the life insurance market, perceived core service quality is most relevant to the development of perceived likeability and competence. Perceived value for money has the strongest influence on perceived service quality, followed by the perceived importance of customer concerns and the extent to which a life insurer is perceived as innovative and reputable. These results are derived from the estimated weights of core service quality's formative measurement model.

These results show that the life insurance market is highly competitive and customers always evaluate services in relation to the insurance premium to be paid. Therefore, the core benefits that consumers derive from their policies play an important strategic role in determining customer loyalty. Further, from a strategic management perspective, our results proof that the overall core service quality is a key factor in life insurance customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Designing and pricing a price-value attractive life insurance policy to meet customer needs are crucial.

According to the results, opportunities for differentiation in a highly competitive life insurance market can arise if customers perceive a product as innovative and reputable. According to the results, a product's innovativeness is rated higher than the simple perception of its quality, which is surprising and opens new strategic product development opportunities for the management.

In multifaceted service contexts, such as the life insurance market, characterised by continuous exchange activity and considerable purchase uncertainty, the long-term interests of customers (i. e. core service quality) should be best served by the company initiating and maintaining lasting relationships with customers characterised by trust. The results show that customer concern is reflected in an expressed need for reliability and customers' desire for the insurer to actively address specific customer interests, in line with Gangil and Vishnoi (2020). The targeted identification of customer concerns and perceived reliability of the insurer are extremely important with regard to life insurers' perceived core service quality. Insurers can satisfy this requirement in two ways.

First, insurers can ensure the best possible coordination between field staff, office staff in the service area, and digital support accepted by customers. Unsuccessful interface management can give customers the impression that their concerns have not been seriously considered, leading to a decline in customer loyalty (Homburg et al. 2010). It is important to reiterate the strategic importance of building a trusted sales force again. Second, more individualised life insurance products (customised policies) can be considered; however, such an approach may lead to smaller collectives and higher per-customer costs, which would generally be less effective (Bikker 2017).

At first glance, the inverse relationship between perceived company success and favourability might seem surprising. In other words, the perceived business success of a life insurance company reduces customers' sympathy for that company, which is in line with findings from Latif et al. (2020) and Sarstedt et al. (2014). One explanation for this could be the service-like nature of the life insurance product, where there are few positive product experiences or directly tangible current customer benefits during the savings phase. However, the focus is initially exclusively on the renunciation of consumption due to the insurance premium, which is usually paid monthly or annually. If a customer perceives that their life insurer is achieving business goals, it has a negative impact on their sympathy for their insurer. However, as perceived company success increases a company's perceived competence, there is neither a positive nor a negative overall effect on customer loyalty.

Finally, the level of corporate social responsibility plays a role in achieving high customer loyalty, which is supported by the findings of Dwertmann et al. (2023), Melo and Garrido-Morgado (2012), and Xuetong et al. (2023). We showed that the social commitment of life insurers, as well as customers' perception of them as fair competitors, have a positive influence on sympathy scores and thus on customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty. Perceived social commitment is detached from the product development and marketing processes and is an interesting marketing aspect for increasing customer loyalty. No impact on customer loyalty could be measured for profiling in the context of environmental activities.

6. Limitations

This study has some limitations. The cross-sectional design of our study limits the interpretation of the results; therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the results of this study. The design of participant recruitment could have led to some selection bias. In subsequent studies, a different design (i. e., pure internet-based) could be chosen to compare the effect sizes.

To better assess the causalities within the model, future research could test our model in an experimental setting using scenarios to manipulate key constructs. Furthermore, despite our best efforts to include the most relevant factors that influence customer loyalty, we could explain 68 % of customer loyalty, and 32 % remain unexplained. The same is true for the levels of explanation (59 – 68 %) of the three other endogenous constructs of our model. Finally, future research can explore the moderating effects of sociodemographic (Schmieder et al. 2019), socioeconomic, and cultural variables, (Kardas et al. 2013), as well as the influence of different pension systems in other countries, on the model.

7. Conclusion

Our findings have several implications for strategic management of endowment insurance products and future research. Overall, the results provide strong empirical support for the intuitive notion that improving a company's core service quality and appeal can increase customer satisfaction and lead to greater customer loyalty. Our findings underscore the need for insurance companies to be perceived as innovative, fair, trustful, and socially engaged. An insurer's business success elicits ambivalent reactions from customers, which have in total no measurable effect on customer loyalty.

From a business perspective, creating customer satisfaction and achieving high likeability scores to retain key customers are necessary for developing customer loyalty, which is particularly important for providers with low customer perceptions of competence. Interestingly, we show that the level of trustworthiness in the salesperson can easily compensate for a customer's perception of a low level of overall competence. This result highlights the strategic importance of a trustworthy sales force as a competitive advantage for a life insurance company. Corporate reputation is crucial for customer loyalty in the life insurance market, and its impact is clearly dominated by the perception of likeability towards the insurer, with perceived competence being less important.

In summary, the results suggest that strategic management of life insurers in Germany should focus on creating a strong emotional bond and make a highly trustful field force strategy a key priority which in turn generates a high level of customer loyalty. Here, assistance services have the potential to offer customers an early positive product experience, usually within the year-long saving phase of a life insurance product. A secondary strategic differentiation objective is to stand out as an innovative and socially committed insurance company in an already highly competitive market.

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