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Driving Sustainable Customer Value Creation through Smart Business Strategy and Technological Innovation among Mitsubishi Xpander Users

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Smart Business Strategy and Technological Innovation relate to Sustainable Customer Value Creation among Mitsubishi Xpander users in Medan. Closed questionnaire data were collected from 100 users selected through purposive sampling and analysed with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS. Smart Business Strategy showed a positive and significant path to Sustainable Customer Value Creation ($\beta = 0.431$, $t = 4.991$, $p < 0.001$), as did Technological Innovation ($\beta = 0.555$, $t = 6.473$, $p < 0.001$), and Smart Business Strategy was strongly associated with Technological Innovation ($\beta = 0.967$, $t = 143.527$, $p < 0.001$). Discriminant validity, however, was not established. All HTMT values exceeded 1.00, the Fornell-Larcker criterion failed, and no combination of items reduced HTMT below 0.90. Respondent-level analysis showed that responses formed two groups, one rating almost all items low and the other rating almost all items high, and that this split, rather than distinct constructs, produced the high correlations. The path estimates are therefore exploratory and describe an overall customer evaluation of Mitsubishi rather than separate causal effects. The study shows why discriminant validity and response quality should be examined before structural results are interpreted, and it proposes how the measurement can be redesigned.

Keywords: Automotive Industry; Mitsubishi Xpander; Smart Business Strategy; Sustainable Customer Value Creation; Technological Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Competition in Indonesia's Low Multi-Purpose Vehicle (LMPV) segment has intensified as several brands offer vehicles with comparable capacity, price, and features. Mitsubishi Xpander has been a major player in this segment since 2017, yet its sales have fluctuated: 75,075 units in 2018, 62,666 in 2019, 26,362 in 2020, and 38,096 in 2021 (Putra & Eddyono, 2024). Part of the 2020 decline reflects the pandemic contraction of the whole market, but the partial recovery in 2021 suggests that product advantages alone no longer sustain the value customers perceive.

Automakers are therefore expected to build value that customers continue to experience over time, not merely to sell units. Sustainable customer value refers to a firm's ability to deliver economic benefits, services, and experiences over an extended period while accounting for social and environmental considerations (Manninen et al., 2024; Rubio-Andrés et al., 2022). Digital transformation and sustainability-oriented marketing have been shown to shape perceived customer value (Steven & Situmorang, 2025), and international automakers have shifted from selling vehicles toward business models built around customer experience and engagement (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2025; Xu et al., 2024).

Recent literature identifies smart business strategy and technological innovation as two drivers of such value. Smart business strategy concerns how firms build flexible, digitally enabled business models that integrate customer needs into value creation (Acciarini et al., 2022; Kukkamalla et al., 2020), including the use of electronic payment in promotion and customer engagement (Hou & Situmorang, 2025). Technological innovation involves adopting technologies such as online platforms, data analytics, and machine learning to improve operations and user experience (de Oliveira Neto et al., 2025), and it can shape consumer behaviour and brand value through digital interaction (Varelie et al., 2025). Studies in local consumer settings show that digital marketing combined with environmentally friendly innovation strengthens consumer responses (Anjeli & Sinaga, 2025) and that green innovation supported by digital technology contributes to lasting competitive advantage (Wijaya & Nasution, 2025). The two components are interrelated: strategy directs where technology is deployed, while technology makes strategy visible to customers (Pérez-Moure et al., 2023).

Research on Mitsubishi Xpander has mostly examined product quality, promotion, brand image, and brand trust as determinants of purchase decisions (Prihatno et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2023), consumer preferences for features, price, and dealer location (Putra & Eddyono, 2024), or descriptive accounts of Xpander's marketing planning (Nala Agustin & Hendra Riofita, 2024). Related local work links digital marketing and service quality to consumer decisions (Maharani & Loo, 2023). International studies on value co-creation, business model innovation, and digital transformation in the automotive industry concentrate on electric vehicles, premium European brands, or multinational firms (Benzidia et al., 2021; Kukkamalla et al., 2020; Wurster et al., 2020), while studies of smart business strategy and technological innovation are more common in manufacturing and technology-based firms (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2025; Purwanto et al., 2023).

The gap addressed here is mainly contextual and empirical. Among the studies reviewed, none examines whether customers of a mass-market LMPV in a regional Indonesian city perceive a firm's strategic and innovative efforts as sources of sustainable value. Location alone is not treated as novelty. The study tests, from the customer's side, whether business-model-level strategy and innovation outputs can be distinguished and how they relate to sustainable customer value; the difficulty of establishing this distinction is itself informative for measurement in this field.

A preliminary survey of 35 Xpander users in Medan supports this focus (Table 1). Most respondents (60.0%) named vehicle features and technological innovation as the aspect most in need of improvement, followed by communication and digital services (14.3%) and by dealer service strategy and after-sales service (11.4% each). Users thus judge the brand not only by vehicle quality but also by how the company renews its offering and service model. The study is expected to contribute to the automotive marketing literature and to give practical input to PT Mitsubishi Motors Krama Yudha Sales Indonesia and its dealer network.

Table 1.
Pre-Survey Results of Aspects That Need Improvement in Mitsubishi Xpander According to Users in Medan City

Aspects That Need Improvement	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Vehicle features and technological innovation	21	60.0%
Communication and digital services	5	14.3%
Dealer service strategy	4	11.4%
After-sales service	4	11.4%
Fuel efficiency	1	2.9%
Total	35	100.0%

Source: Researcher's preliminary survey results (2026), n = 35 respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smart Business Strategy

Dynamic Capabilities Theory holds that firms gain advantage by sensing opportunities, seizing them, and reconfiguring resources as the environment changes. Teece (2018) argues that these capabilities are expressed most concretely in the design and redesign of the business model, that is, in what a firm offers, how it organises value creation, and how it captures returns. Following this argument, Smart Business Strategy is defined here as a firm's strategic capacity to renew its business model in response to digital and market change so that it keeps generating value for customers. The construct is therefore measured through its observable expression, business model innovation, rather than through internal planning that customers cannot see.

Clauss (2017) developed and validated a business model innovation scale with three dimensions, and each represents one face of strategy as customers experience it. Value Proposition Innovation reflects new offerings, customer segments, and channels; Value Creation Innovation reflects new capabilities, partners, and processes behind the offer; Value Capture Innovation reflects new revenue and cost models, such as financing schemes or service packages. Automotive studies support this reading. Acciarini et al. (2022) found that digitalization pushed an automaker to rethink how value is created, delivered, and captured, and Kukkamalla et al. (2020) show that BMW enacted its strategic shift toward mobility services through business model innovation. Smart Business Strategy differs from Technological Innovation in level: it concerns the logic that configures and monetises novelty, whereas Technological Innovation concerns the novelty of products, processes, and tools themselves (Foss & Saebi, 2017).

Technological Innovation

From the Resource-Based View, innovation is a strategic asset that yields advantage when firms combine resources and technology in ways rivals cannot easily imitate. The Oslo Manual framework, operationalised by Gunday et al. (2011), separates product and process innovation, usually labelled technological, from marketing and organizational innovation, which are non-technological. Grouping all four under Technological Innovation therefore needs a narrower definition. In this study the construct means technology-enabled innovation as perceived by customers: product innovation refers to new vehicle features and technologies, process innovation to technology-supported sales, service, and maintenance processes, marketing innovation to digitally enabled communication and promotion, and organizational innovation to technology-supported ways in which the dealer network organises service and customer relationships. Marketing and organizational innovation are retained only in this technology-enabled sense, since digital transformation in the automotive industry extends technological novelty beyond the vehicle into services and organisational arrangements (Lopez-Vega & Moodysson, 2023).

Empirical evidence supports treating the four types as complementary. Gunday et al. (2011) found that organizational innovation underpins product and process innovation, which in turn improve firm performance, and de Oliveira Neto et al. (2025) show that technological innovation in emerging-market multinationals develops through co-creation with customers and partners. Technological Innovation therefore captures what is new in the offering and its delivery, while Smart Business Strategy captures how the business model is redesigned to create and capture value from that novelty.

Sustainable Customer Value Creation

Based on Service-Dominant Logic, customer value develops through interaction and resource integration between firms and customers. Sustainable Customer Value Creation refers to enduring value that customers obtain through digital services, product and service quality, and relationship management. Rantala et al. (2019) identify Service

Process-Related Value, Product-Related Value, and Cost-Related Value, which serve as its dimensions. Because respondents are users rather than managers, all three constructs in this study capture customer perceptions of what appears at observable touchpoints, namely the vehicle, the dealer and after-sales processes, digital communication, and pricing or financing, rather than internal company capabilities.

Smart Business Strategy on Sustainable Customer Value Creation

Smart Business Strategy combines digital technology, data, and customer focus to build competitive advantage and raise customer value (Kukkamalla et al., 2020). Flexible business models allow firms to respond quickly to changing demand through new services and faster decisions (Acciarini et al., 2022). In the automotive sector, renewing the value proposition and the way value is delivered, for example through service packages, financing schemes, or digital customer channels, can strengthen long-term relationships and the value customers continue to perceive.

H1: Smart Business Strategy positively influences Sustainable Customer Value Creation.

Technological Innovation on Sustainable Customer Value Creation

Technological Innovation is a business capability to create and implement new technologies to improve product and service quality (Lopez-Vega & Moodysson, 2023). In the automotive sector, innovative technology is reflected through the development of vehicle features, digital services, and support systems that can improve user experience. Companies that continuously innovate will be better able to meet changing customer needs, thereby increasing the benefits perceived by users over the long term (Varelie et al., 2025). In other words, technological innovation is one of the key elements in shaping sustainable customer value.

H2: Technological Innovation positively influences Sustainable Customer Value Creation.

Smart Business Strategy on Technological Innovation

Successful business strategies not only focus on achieving company targets, but also facilitate the emergence of innovation in response to changes in the business environment. Companies that adopt Smart Business Strategy will be more efficient in managing resources, utilizing digital technology, and encouraging the emergence of innovations that are aligned with market demand (Acciarini et al., 2022). In the automotive sector, a flexible business approach will accelerate the development of new technologies so that companies can maintain their competitive advantage. Thus, the more effectively Smart Business Strategy is implemented, the greater the company's ability to generate Technological Innovation.

H3: Smart Business Strategy positively influences Technological Innovation.

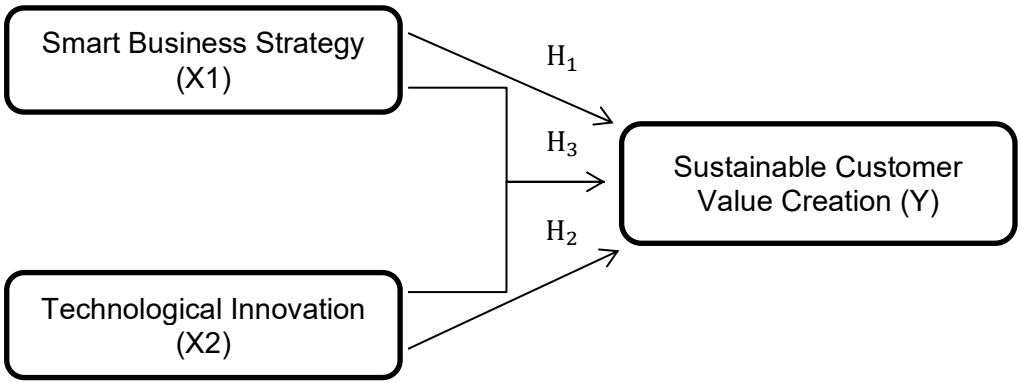


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Kukkamalla et al. (2020), Acciarini et al. (2022), Rubio-Andrés et al. (2022), Manninen et al. (2024), and Pérez-Moure et al. (2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a quantitative approach with a descriptive-causal design to examine the relationships among Smart Business Strategy, Technological Innovation, and Sustainable Customer Value Creation among Mitsubishi Xpander users in Medan City. Data collection was carried out through a survey using closed-ended questionnaires.

The population comprises all Mitsubishi Xpander users in Medan City. Because its size is unknown, purposive sampling was used (Varelie et al., 2025), as the study required respondents with direct experience of the vehicle and its dealer services who could assess the constructs.

Respondents had to live in Medan, be at least 17 years old, own or actively use a Mitsubishi Xpander, and have used it for at least six months. They were drawn from 14 of the 21 districts of Medan City.

Sample size followed the ten-times rule described by Hair et al. (2014), under which the sample should be at least ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at any construct. Sustainable Customer Value Creation receives two paths, giving a minimum of 20 respondents; the 100 respondents collected exceed this minimum.

All items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Smart Business Strategy was measured with three dimensions and six items, Technological Innovation with four dimensions and eight items, and Sustainable Customer Value Creation with three dimensions and six items, giving 20 items in total (Clauss, 2017; Gunday et al., 2011; Rantala et al., 2019).

Data were analysed using SmartPLS 4. The outer model was evaluated through outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and AVE, and discriminant validity through HTMT, its bootstrap confidence intervals, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and cross-loadings. Because discriminant validity failed, the indicator data were further examined through an exhaustive search of item subsets, a single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and inspection of respondent-level response patterns (Meade & Craig, 2012). The inner model was assessed through path coefficients, bootstrapping (5,000 resamples), R^2, and f^2.

RESULTS

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics

Construct	1	2	3	4
	Min.	Max.	*M*	*SD*
Smart Business Strategy	1.33	4.50	3.805	0.864
Technological Innovation	1.75	4.50	3.760	0.855
Sustainable Customer Value Creation	1.50	4.50	3.817	0.881

Source: Research data processing results, 2026.

All construct means (3.760 to 3.817) lie above the scale midpoint, indicating that respondents viewed the strategy, innovation, and value aspects of Mitsubishi Xpander fairly positively (Table 2).

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed through outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE, and HTMT.

Table 3.
Outer Loading

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading
Smart Business Strategy	X1.1	0.800
	X1.2	0.845
	X1.3	0.796
	X1.4	0.795
	X1.5	0.785
	X1.6	0.726
Technological Innovation	X2.1	0.843
	X2.2	0.804
	X2.3	0.798
	X2.4	0.776
	X2.5	0.807
	X2.6	0.715
	X2.7	0.728
	X2.8	0.792
Sustainable Customer Value Creation	Y1	0.848
	Y2	0.798
	Y3	0.765
	Y4	0.802
	Y5	0.824
	Y6	0.791

Source: SmartPLS 4 data processing results, 2026.

All outer loadings range from 0.715 to 0.848, above the 0.70 threshold, which supports indicator reliability.

Table 4.
Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Smart Business Strategy	0.881	0.910	0.627
Technological Innovation	0.910	0.927	0.614
Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.891	0.917	0.648

Source: SmartPLS 4 data processing results, 2026.

Cronbach's Alpha (0.881 to 0.910), Composite Reliability (0.910 to 0.927), and AVE (0.614 to 0.648) meet the usual thresholds in the full sample (Table 4). As shown below, however, these values mainly reflect differences between two groups of respondents rather than coherent construct structure.

Table 5.
HTMT

Construct Relationship	HTMT
Smart Business Strategy → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	1.091
Smart Business Strategy → Technological Innovation	1.080
Technological Innovation → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	1.079

Source: SmartPLS 4 data processing results, 2026.

Discriminant validity is not established. HTMT compares the correlations between indicators of different constructs with those between indicators of the same construct, and values above 0.85 or 0.90 indicate that two constructs are not empirically distinct (Henseler et al., 2015). All three values exceed 1.00 (1.091, 1.080, and 1.079), and their bootstrap 95% confidence intervals (5,000 resamples) lie entirely above 1 (1.053 to 1.145). The Fornell-Larcker criterion also fails, since construct correlations (0.967 to 0.972) far exceed the square roots of AVE (0.784 to 0.805).

The measurement items were then rechecked in three ways. First, items correlate more strongly on average with items of other constructs (mean r = 0.608) than with items of their own construct (mean r = 0.561), and five items (X1.5, X2.3, X2.4, Y4, and Y5) load more highly on another construct than on their own. Second, an exhaustive search of all 386,316 item combinations that retain at least three items per construct found no model with every HTMT below 0.90; the lowest maximum value was 0.981. Removing items therefore cannot resolve the problem. Third, a single factor accounts for 61.5% of item variance (first eigenvalue 12.31, second 0.89), which points to one general evaluation and to possible common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Respondent profiles explain this pattern. Nineteen respondents gave scores of 1 to 3 on almost all items (98.4% of their answers), whereas 81 gave scores of 3 to 5 (99.6% of their answers), and one respondent gave the same answer to every item. Within the group of 81, items of the same construct are on average slightly negatively correlated (r = −0.09) and Cronbach's Alpha is negative for all three constructs. The loadings, reliability, and inter-construct correlations in the full sample therefore arise mainly from the gap between the two groups, a pattern consistent with undifferentiated or careless responding (Meade & Craig, 2012). The structural results below are reported for completeness but are exploratory: they describe how one overall favourable or unfavourable evaluation of Mitsubishi is shared across the three item sets.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was examined using R-square, f-square, path coefficients, bootstrapping, and SRMR, in accordance with the analytical methods determined in the study.

Table 6.
R-Square

Endogenous Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Technological Innovation	0.936	0.935
Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.957	0.956

Source: SmartPLS 4 data processing results, 2026.

The R^2 values are 0.936 for Technological Innovation and 0.957 for Sustainable Customer Value Creation, which are unusually high for perceptual survey data and consistent with the HTMT results.

Table 7.
Effect Size

Relationship	f^2
Smart Business Strategy → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.279
Smart Business Strategy → Technological Innovation	14.551
Technological Innovation → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.464

Source: SmartPLS 4 data processing results, 2026.

The f^2 values are 0.279 for Smart Business Strategy on Sustainable Customer Value Creation, 0.464 for Technological Innovation on Sustainable Customer Value Creation, and 14.551 for Smart Business Strategy on Technological Innovation (Table 7). The last value follows directly from the R^2 of 0.936. Because Technological Innovation has Smart Business Strategy as its only predictor, the implied inner VIF of the two predictors of Sustainable Customer Value Creation is about 15.6 (1/(1 − 0.936)), far above the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2014), so collinearity is likely to make the estimates for H1 and H2 unstable.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4, with the results presented in Table 8.

Table 8.
Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1	Smart Business Strategy → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.431	4.991	<0.001	Supported
H2	Technological Innovation → Sustainable Customer Value Creation	0.555	6.473	<0.001	Supported
H3	Smart Business Strategy → Technological Innovation	0.967	143.527	<0.001	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping results, 2026.

All three paths are positive and significant at $p < 0.001$: Smart Business Strategy to Sustainable Customer Value Creation ($\beta = 0.431$), Technological Innovation to Sustainable Customer Value Creation ($\beta = 0.555$), and Smart Business Strategy to Technological Innovation ($\beta = 0.967$). H1, H2, and H3 are thus supported statistically, subject to the validity problems noted above.

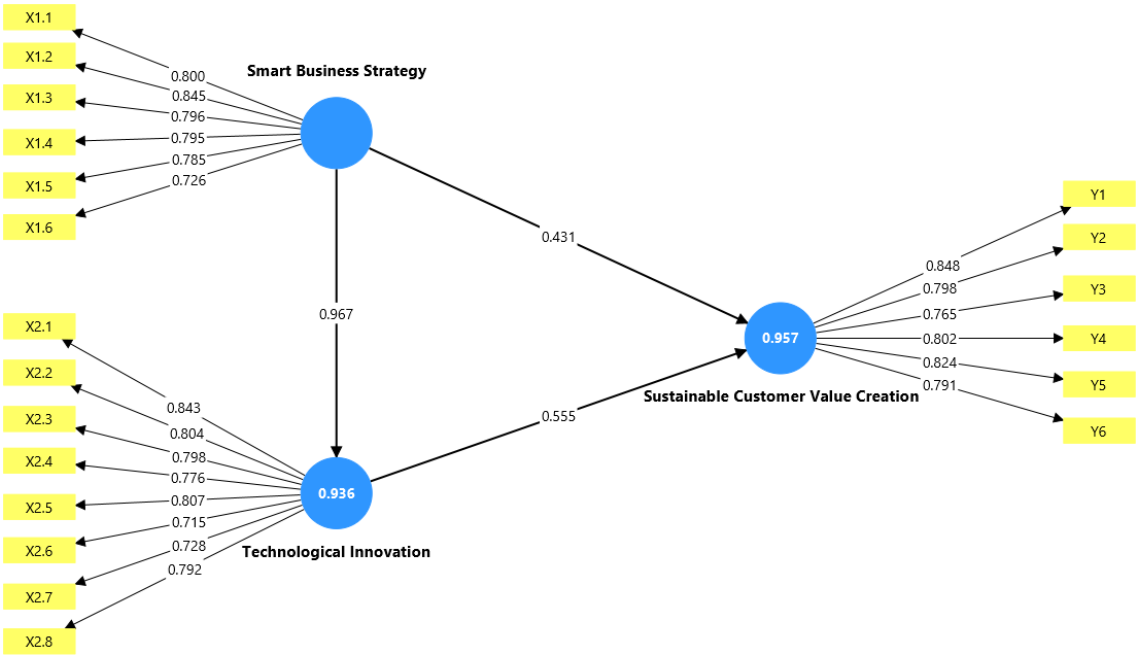


Figure 2. PLS-SEM Structural Model

DISCUSSION

Smart Business Strategy on Sustainable Customer Value Creation.

H1 is supported statistically. For Xpander users, strategy becomes visible when Mitsubishi changes what it offers and how it delivers it, for instance through service packages, financing schemes, and digital channels linking customers with dealers. Users who notice these changes also report greater long-term value, which agrees with Acciarini et al. (2022) and Kukkamalla et al. (2020), who show that automakers renewing their business models around digital services strengthen customer relationships. Those studies, however, are qualitative case analyses of firm-level change, whereas the present evidence comes from customer perceptions. The coefficient of 0.431 also needs caution, since collinearity between the two predictors means that their shared effect may be divided almost arbitrarily between H1 and H2.

Technological Innovation on Sustainable Customer Value Creation.

H2 is also supported statistically, and its coefficient (0.555) is the larger of the two direct effects. This order is plausible for Xpander users, as the pre-survey showed that features and technological innovation were the aspect they most wanted improved; product changes are the most tangible novelty an LMPV owner experiences. The result parallels de Oliveira Neto et al. (2025), who link technological innovation to performance in emerging markets, and Rantala et al. (2019), who show that digitality supports sustainable customer value. Unlike those firm-level studies, this study measures innovation through users' eyes, so part of the effect may reflect a general favourable impression of the brand rather than specific innovations.

Smart Business Strategy on Technological Innovation.

H3 is supported, but the coefficient of 0.967 and the R^2 of 0.936 show that Smart Business Strategy and Technological Innovation are almost indistinguishable in the data. Acciarini et al. (2022) likewise found that digitalization and business model renewal advance together in the automotive sector, yet a coefficient of this size is better explained by measurement overlap than by a causal effect of strategy on innovation.

The overlap (HTMT = 1.080) has conceptual and response-related sources. Conceptually, the dimensions map onto each other. Value proposition innovation in Clauss (2017) refers to new offerings, which customers experience as product innovation; value creation innovation includes new technologies and processes, which parallels process and organizational innovation; and value capture innovation through new pricing or financing models resembles marketing innovation. The constructs differ in level, since business model innovation is the logic that configures and monetises novelty while technological innovation is the novelty itself (Foss & Saebi, 2017), but customers can hardly observe that difference, particularly as they meet both at the same touchpoints. The response analysis adds a stronger explanation. Customers appear to have answered with one overall judgement of Mitsubishi, positive for most and negative for a minority, rather than evaluating each item separately. Since all constructs were measured with one instrument, from the same respondents, at one point in time, common method variance and careless responding cannot be ruled out (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Meade & Craig, 2012). The paths for H1, H2, and H3 should therefore be read as associations within one general evaluation, not as evidence that the three constructs are distinct.

CONCLUSION

Among Mitsubishi Xpander users in Medan, Smart Business Strategy and Technological Innovation were positively and significantly related to Sustainable Customer Value Creation, and Smart Business Strategy was strongly related to Technological Innovation, so H1, H2, and H3 are statistically supported.

These conclusions are exploratory. HTMT values above 1.00 that no item combination could reduce below 0.90, a failed Fornell-Larcker test, and a split of respondents into uniformly low and uniformly high raters show that the data do not distinguish the three constructs. The findings indicate that users form one integrated impression of Mitsubishi's strategy, innovation, and long-term value; they do not confirm three separate effects.

RECOMMENDATION

Mitsubishi and its dealer network can raise perceived long-term value by renewing service packages, financing schemes, and digital customer channels together with improvements to vehicle features, since users appear to evaluate these as a single experience.

Future studies should also involve more respondents and a wider geographical scope.

The main lesson for future research concerns measurement. Strategy items should refer to business-level choices such as pricing schemes and service models, innovation items to concrete technical features, and value items to outcomes users have experienced. Questionnaires should include attention-check and reverse-worded items, and responses should be screened for straight-lining and uniform answering before analysis (Meade & Craig, 2012). Discriminant validity should be confirmed with HTMT confidence intervals (Henseler et al., 2015) before structural paths are interpreted, and strategy data from managers or dealers could reduce common method variance.

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