

BUILDING POSITIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH REPUTATION: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER VALUE

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Abstract

Background- Intensifying competition among private universities institutions in Indonesia has increased the need to identify strategic factors that drive positive word of mouth (WOM) among students.

Aim- This study aims to examine the effects of service quality on customer value and student satisfaction, as well as to test the mediating role of student satisfaction in the relationship between service quality, customer value, and WOM.

Design /methodology /approach- This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method on 200 active students at one of the PTS in Gresik Regency. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Findings- The results indicate that service quality has a positive and significant effect on customer value and student satisfaction. In addition, customer value significantly influences student satisfaction. The key finding reveals that student satisfaction plays a mediating role in strengthening the effects of service quality and customer value on positive WOM.

Research implications- This study contributes empirical evidence to the service marketing and private universities literature and offers practical implications for private universities administrators in developing sustainable service quality and customer value strategies.

Research limitations- This study used a cross-sectional design and one research location, so it was not able to capture changes in student perceptions longitudinally and limited the generalizability of the findings to other private universities contexts.

Keywords: Service Quality, Perceived Value, Student Satisfaction, Word-Of-Mouth

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Abstrak

Latar Belakang- Persaingan yang semakin ketat antar Perguruan Tinggi Swasta (PTS) di Indonesia menuntut institusi pendidikan tinggi untuk memahami faktor-faktor strategis yang mendorong Word of Mouth (WOM) positif di kalangan mahasiswa.

Tujuan- Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kualitas layanan terhadap nilai pelanggan dan kepuasan mahasiswa, serta menguji peran mediasi kepuasan mahasiswa dalam hubungan antara kualitas layanan, nilai pelanggan, dan WOM.

Desain /metodologi/pendekatan- Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei terhadap 200 mahasiswa aktif pada salah satu PTS di Kabupaten Gresik. Data dianalisis menggunakan regresi linier berganda untuk menguji hubungan antar variabel penelitian.

Temuan- Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas layanan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap nilai pelanggan dan kepuasan mahasiswa. Selain itu, nilai pelanggan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kepuasan mahasiswa. Temuan utama penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa kepuasan mahasiswa berperan sebagai variabel mediasi yang memperkuat pengaruh kualitas layanan dan nilai pelanggan terhadap WOM positif.

Implikasi penelitian Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi empiris dalam pengembangan literatur pemasaran jasa pendidikan serta implikasi praktis bagi pengelola PTS dalam merancang strategi peningkatan kualitas layanan dan penciptaan nilai pelanggan secara berkelanjutan.



Batasan penelitian- Penelitian ini menggunakan desain cross-sectional dan satu lokasi penelitian, sehingga belum mampu menangkap perubahan persepsi mahasiswa secara longitudinal dan membatasi generalisasi temuan ke konteks perguruan tinggi lainnya.

Kata kunci: Kualitas Layanan, Nilai Pelanggan, Kepuasan Mahasiswa, *Word-Of-Mouth*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the private universities industry in Indonesia over the past decade has shown increasingly complex dynamics. Competition among universities, particularly among Private Universities (PTS), has increased significantly along with the growing number of institutions and changing preferences of students as the primary customers of educational services. The latest data from the Private universities Database (PDDikti) for 2024 shows that there are more than 3,270 active PTS, an increase compared to the 3,100 institutions in the 2019–2020 period. However, the increase in the number of institutions is not entirely proportional to an increase in quality. The 2023 BAN-PT report states that only around 19% of PTS have achieved institutional accreditation A or B, while the remainder are still struggling to meet minimum quality standards (Akbar, 2025; Luckyardi et al., 2022; Tempo, 2023)

At the same time, the number of new students at private universities has fluctuated. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, public interest in private universities declined, but recovered in 2022–2024, primarily due to the support of

digital learning systems and the flexibility of educational services (Sadono, 2025; Sholihah et al., 2025). Putri et al., (2024); Wibowo & Ayuningtyas, (2024) Recent trends indicate that Generation Z students place greater emphasis on service experiences (*service experience*), the quality of digital interactions, and *value for money*. In choosing an institution, this places service quality as a strategic aspect for creating customer value and student satisfaction (Adinda et al., 2024; Indriati & Widyastuti, 2025; Luckyardi et al., 2022)

In the context of competition, PTS differentiation is not only built through accreditation or physical facilities, but also through brand *image*, academic reputation, learning innovation, and the quality of the student experience. Recent studies confirm that university branding based on student experience has a strong influence on decisions to choose and recommend a campus, including through management, *brand image*, alumni experience, and social media exposure. With the increasingly fragmented education market and limited promotional budgets, private universities are starting to rely on organic marketing strategies, one of which is *Word-of-Mouth*

(WOM) and *electronic WOM* (e-WOM) (Arief & Brabo, 2024a; Chen & Chen, 2022; Widjonarko, 2024)

WOM has proven to be one of the most effective forms of communication in the education services sector. Recent research shows that WOM and e-WOM have a stronger influence than conventional advertising influence perceptions of quality and new student enrollment decisions, as they are considered more credible and based on the actual experiences of service users. In the context of private universities, WOM occurs when students are satisfied with the service they receive and assess that the benefits they receive are worth or exceed the costs incurred. Student satisfaction itself is greatly influenced by service quality (*service quality*) and customer value (*customer value*), as confirmed by various studies after 2019 which found a positive and significant relationship between service quality, customer value, satisfaction, and recommendation intention (Khusaini & Hartono, 2024; Litasari, 2024; A. A. A. Putri & Kristiningsih, 2024).

On the other hand, internal challenges remain in many private universities, such as student complaints about unstable digital infrastructure, slow academic service bureaucracy, limited learning facilities, and a lack of lecturer responsiveness in the digital space. Reports and surveys at various universities in the 2022–2023 period also indicate complaints about slow

administrative services, suboptimal integration of academic information systems, and network disruptions in online learning, which impact the learning experience and student satisfaction. Internal reports from several private universities in the 2022–2023 period also indicate a trend toward a 6–10% decline in first-semester student retention, in line with the national phenomenon of high first-year dropout rates (Adinda et al., 2024; Indriati & Widyastuti, 2025; Khusaini & Hartono, 2024; Meranga et al., 2025)

Under these conditions, improving service quality and customer value is not only a marketing strategy, but also a strategic necessity for retaining students and encouraging positive word of mouth (WOM). Implementing digital transformation in academic services, strengthening brand image based on student experience, and systematically managing e-WOM are key agendas for private universities seeking to increase student satisfaction, loyalty, and retention amidst increasingly fierce competition (Adinda et al., 2024; Litasari, 2024)

Various previous studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of student satisfaction in private universities, particularly regarding service quality, perceived value, loyalty, and WOM/e-WOM. Trisela & Hermanto, (2022) found that service quality has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction and loyalty,

and that satisfaction is an important pathway to loyalty formation. Luthfiana et al., (2025) showed that university service quality has a significant positive effect on student satisfaction and loyalty, with satisfaction acting as a partial mediator in the context of public universities. Putri & Kristiningsih, (2024) examined service quality and customer *value on* loyalty mediated by trust and satisfaction, and confirmed that satisfaction and trust are the main determinants of long-term loyalty. Khusaini & Hartono, (2024) validated the HESQUAL scale and showed that service quality has a positive effect on brand *image and* satisfaction, which further drives student retention and recommendation intentions. Litasari, (2024) specifically analyzed how service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction influence loyalty and *word-of-mouth* students, and found that the quality of service influence *word-of-mouth* and loyalty through satisfaction and *perceived value*. These findings confirm the importance of service quality, customer value, and student satisfaction as the key to forming WOM/e-WOM in private universities

Most international studies focus on the role of service quality and perceived value as antecedents of satisfaction and loyalty and complaints as consequences, but not many have simultaneously examined the complete chain of service quality, customer value, WOM satisfaction/e-WOM in the

highly competitive context of PTS. Research based on *American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)* for example, only including trust, perceived quality, and perceived value as antecedents, with consequences limited to complaints and loyalty without including advocacy behaviors such as e-WOM which now greatly determine the image of private universities (Jasrai & Bakshi, 2024; Sujatha et al., 2025)

Furthermore, several recent studies in the private universities sector still focus on service quality and satisfaction as predictors of loyalty, but do not elaborate on the mediating role of student satisfaction in bridging the influence of service quality and learning experience on WOM/e-WOM. However, recent findings suggest that satisfaction and trust in a university brand can be important mediators between perceived quality and students' intention to recommend the campus to others (Puteri, 2024)

From the perspective of the relationship between private universities and Gen Z, much international research has focused on the context of state universities, public universities, or private universities systems in developed countries, while studies on private universities in developing countries with highly competitive markets are still relatively limited. The few studies that specifically examine private universities tend to focus on specific regional settings (e.g., Turkey or Northern Cyprus), making

generalizations to the context of Indonesian private universities with their high levels of market fragmentation and quality variation inadequate (Luckyardi et al., 2022; Sujatha et al., 2025)

Research on WOM in private universities generally places satisfaction as a predictor but has not consistently tested its role as a mediator between service quality, learning experience, and student advocacy intentions. Most studies highlight the influence of e-WOM on enrollment decisions or institutional reputation, but have not comprehensively explored how the combination of service quality, customer value, and digital experience encourages students to engage in positive WOM in the context of intense competition in the private universities sector (Luckyardi et al., 2022; Meranga et al., 2025)

In addition, research on the consequences of student satisfaction still focuses more on loyalty (intention to continue studying, intention not to change campus) and does not explore enough other relevant behaviors such as advocacy intention, *positive online reviews*, and *willingness to defend the institution* in the digital space. However, recent findings suggest that satisfaction and emotional attachment to a university can encourage students to actively advocate for and promote the campus through WOM, which is particularly important when promotional budgets are limited (Juhaidi et al., 2025;

Taha & Reynolds, 2025). The novelty of this research lies in the development of a model that simultaneously tests the influence of service quality, customer value, on satisfaction and its behavioral consequences in the form of WOM in the context of one of Indonesia's private universities, with student satisfaction as the main mediating variable, which has not been fully integrated in previous studies that generally only test the partial relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty or are limited to the e-learning aspect pre-service *quality only* (Adinda et al., 2024; Indriati & Widyastuti, 2025; Khusaini & Hartono, 2024; Sujatha et al., 2025)

The urgency of this research is driven by the decline or fluctuation in the acceptance of new students at PTS, the shift in preferences of Generation Z who increasingly demand experience and value of benefits and value *for money*, as well as the increasing role of WOM in shaping the reputation and competitiveness of PTS amidst competition with PTN-BH and global platforms, so that PTS requires a clear empirical model to design strategies to improve service quality and strengthen student advocacy. The purpose of this study is to determine the role of antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction: an application in Private Private universities



THEORETICAL REVIEW

Privates Universities Marketing Strategy

Privates Universities marketing strategies are evolving from traditional promotional approaches to long-term relationship management with prospective and existing students, in line with increasing competition and changing behaviors of Generation Z. Recent literature positions students as “customers” who assess the entire experience, from initial information search to learning experiences and post-study services, so that marketing is no longer understood merely as a promotional activity, but as an orchestration of the entire marketing mix of educational services (Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024; Oyedele, 2024; Zohriah et al., 2024)

First, strategy *branding* and *positioning* become the foundation of the main marketing of private universities. Various studies confirm that brand *image*, academic reputation and program differentiation play a vital role in attracting prospective students and strengthening the trust of parents and stakeholders. Effective branding is built through a narrative of academic excellence, *employability*, student and alumni testimonials, and visual identity consistency across various communication channels, including social media and official websites. In the context of Generation Z, strengthening *storytelling* on campus and highlighting everyday student experiences

on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have been shown to increase emotional closeness and engagement (Balakrishnan, 2025; Dewi & Budiwati, 2024; Digital, 2025; Oyedele, 2024; Zohriah et al., 2024)

Second, digital marketing has become a key pillar of modern private universities marketing strategies. Empirical studies show that digital marketing practices such as content marketing, *email marketing*, social media, and mobile marketing contribute significantly to students' relational experiences and enrollment decisions. Using social media to build communities, share authentic content, and facilitate two-way interactions allows institutions to reach prospective students in the digital spaces they use every day. Research also confirms that integrating email marketing with CRM systems, personalized messaging, and segmenting based on program interests increase the effectiveness of converting from initial interest to actual enrollment (Benckekroun et al., 2024; Benckekroun & Soulami, 2024; Digital, 2025; HEM-Higher-Marketing-education, 2025; Juhaidi et al., 2025)

Third, *word-of-mouth* Word of Mouth (WOM) is positioned as one of the most effective strategies in private universities marketing, especially in the private sector. Studies in various countries show that recommendations from friends, family, and alumni, both directly and through online

reviews and user-generated content, have a strong influence on perceptions of quality and decisions to choose a university. Marketing strategies oriented towards creating a positive student experience, both academically and non-academic, seen as a way to stimulate sustainable organic WOM (Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024; Balakrishnan, 2025; Juhaidi et al., 2025)

Fourth, the approach *relationship marketing* emphasizes building long-term relationships with students, parents, and external partners. The relationship marketing model in educational services emphasizes the quality of interactions, trust, commitment, and ongoing communication as determinants of satisfaction and loyalty. Its implementation includes responsive consulting services, academic and career mentoring, alumni programs, and industry engagement, which in turn strengthen the institution's reputation and attractiveness (Balakrishnan, 2025; Kasimbara et al., 2024; Raya & Iswari, 2024)

Finally, several studies recommend the use of the 7P marketing mix framework (*product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence*) adapted to the context of private universities. This adjustment includes curriculum design that is relevant to the job market (*product*), competitive fee and scholarship schemes (*price*), ease of access to information and online services (*place* and *process*),

competence and empathy of lecturers and staff (*people*), as well as the quality of physical and virtual facilities that can be directly observed by prospective students. The combination of strong branding strategies, *digital marketing* integrated WOM management, relationship *marketing* Consistent quality is seen as a prerequisite for universities to survive and grow in an increasingly competitive education market (Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024; Balakrishnan, 2025)

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word of Mouth (WOM) is a form of interpersonal communication that is highly influential in the decision-making process, particularly in the private universities sector. WOM is defined as recommendations, reviews, or information passed from one individual to another informally, without commercial motivation, and based on the actual experiences of service users. In the context of private universities, WOM often originates from students, alumni, parents, or social communities who share their experiences regarding the quality of service, reputation, and benefits obtained from an educational institution.

Research shows that WOM has a stronger influence than conventional advertising in shaping prospective students' perceptions and decisions regarding their choice of university. Empirical studies



confirm that students who are satisfied with academic and non-academic services tend to provide positive recommendations to others, both directly and through social media (e-WOM), which ultimately strengthens the institution's image and appeal. Influence Factors contributing to positive WOM formation include academic service quality, perceived value, institutional image, and a satisfying learning experience. When students perceive that the benefits they receive are commensurate with or greater than the costs, they are more likely to spread positive information about the institution (Arief & Brabo, 2024b; Deo et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2025; Syahrinullah & Syamsuddin, 2024)

Furthermore, WOM also serves as an organic and low-cost promotional channel, especially for private universities with limited marketing budgets. Research in various countries, including Indonesia, shows that WOM is a dominant factor in attracting new students, especially in areas with limited access to formal information. In the digital era, e-WOM through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and online forums is increasingly becoming a primary source of information for prospective students. The quality of digital services, student satisfaction, and loyalty have been shown to be key drivers of positive e-WOM in private universities environments.

Theoretically, WOM is considered an indicator of customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty, as well as a mediator between service quality, institutional image, and recommendation intention. Recent models also suggest that WOM is influenced not only by satisfaction but also by emotional attachment, trust, and positive digital experiences. Therefore, private universities marketing strategies that want to optimally utilize WOM need to prioritize improving service quality, student experience, and reputation management in the digital space.

Quality of Service

Service quality is a core concept in service marketing, including in the private universities sector, indicating the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations, in this case students as users of educational services. The most popular service quality theory in the private universities context is the SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, which identifies five main dimensions: *tangibles*, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *assurance* and *empathy*. These dimensions are considered relevant for measuring and improving the quality of service in private universities.

Empirical research shows that service quality has a significant influence on student satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Recent studies confirm that the dimensions *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *assurance*, and

empathy tends to have more influence on satisfaction than dimensions *tangible*, although physical facilities remain an important aspect in students' initial perceptions. *Responsiveness*, for example, related to the speed and accuracy of academic and administrative services, while assurance reflects the competence and trust engendered by staff and lecturers. Empathy emphasizes personal attention and the ability of staff to understand individual student needs (R. Hapsari et al., 2017a; Seitova et al., 2024; Suryaman & Tukiran, 2025; Windasari et al., 2024).

In addition to the SERVQUAL model, several researchers have also developed alternative approaches such as HESQUAL (*Private universities Service Quality*) that adapts the dimensions of service quality to the context of private universities, including faculty profiles, curriculum, infrastructure, support staff, employment opportunities, security, and student skills development. This model demonstrates that service quality in private universities encompasses not only academic aspects but also learning experiences, administrative services, and student readiness for the workforce (Susila & Iramani, 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2024)

Service quality is also influenced by external factors such as digital transformation, the integration of academic information systems, and the changing expectations of Generation Z students, who demand fast, responsive, and technology-

based services. Recent research shows that e-service quality is becoming increasingly important, particularly in the context of online learning and online administrative services. When digital services are well-managed, students are more satisfied and loyal to the institution.

Thus, service quality is a key factor that not only determines student satisfaction but also forms the basis for a university's reputation, competitiveness, and survival amidst increasingly fierce competition. Universities that are able to manage service quality comprehensively, both physically and digitally, will be better able to retain students, increase retention, and encourage positive word of mouth (WOM) as a form of student advocacy (R. F. Hapsari et al., 2025; Seitova et al., 2024; Suryaman & Tukiran, 2025)

Research related to service quality and its consequences has been widely conducted by researchers in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior, especially in the service sector. Research in the field of aviation services, for example (R. F. Hapsari et al., 2025) customer engagement has the most influential influence on passenger loyalty, followed by customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has the largest total effect on customer engagement. Service quality, value obtained and customer satisfaction also indirectly influence customer loyalty through mediation, (Hussain et al., 2015; Jiang & Zhang, 2016)

education services and private universities. Based on the description, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₁: Service quality has an effect on student perceived value.

H₂: Service quality has an effect on student satisfaction

Customer Value

Customer value is a core concept in service marketing, including in the private universities sector, which describes the customer's assessment of the benefits obtained compared to the costs incurred. In the context of private universities, customer value (*customer value*) is defined as students' perceptions of the total benefits received from educational services, both academically and non-academic, relative to the total costs incurred, including financial, time, and effort. Customer value reflects not only the economic aspects, but also the psychological, social, and emotional aspects experienced by students during their studies (Hussain et al., 2015; Jiang & Zhang, 2016) (Guzmán, 2023; Rimiyati & Rahmadhani, 2024)

Customer value theory in private universities is often associated with the concept of "*value for money*" And "*value co creation*", where students actively play a role in creating value through interactions with the institution, lecturers, and fellow students. Research shows that customer value is influenced by various dimensions,

such as service quality, curriculum relevance, institutional reputation, learning experience, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Students who perceive that the benefits they receive are commensurate with or exceed the costs incurred will perceive the customer value they receive as high, which in turn drives satisfaction, loyalty, and positive WOM (Le & Nguyen, 2024; Litasari, 2024)

Empirically, customer value has been shown to be an important mediator between service quality and student satisfaction, as well as between satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Studies at various universities show that high customer value is positively correlated with student satisfaction, retention intentions, and intentions to recommend the institution to others. Furthermore, customer value also plays a key role in differentiating decisions about college choice, particularly among Generation Z students who place a high emphasis on "*value for money*" and learning experiences that are relevant to the world of work (Balakrishnan, 2025; HEM-Higher-Marketing-education, 2025; Litasari, 2024).

Customer value is also influenced by external factors such as digital transformation, integration of academic information systems, and changing student preferences for fast, responsive, and technology-based services. Students who perceive digital services as facilitating access to information, registration,

payments, and communication with the institution will perceive higher customer value. Therefore, strategies to increase customer value should include improving service quality, curriculum relevance, institutional reputation, and learning experiences that are relevant to student needs (Guzmán, 2023; Ronda, 2024)

In practice, customer value is a strategic variable for private universities institutions to maintain competitiveness, strengthen student loyalty, and encourage positive word of mouth (WOM) as a form of student advocacy. Private universities institutions that can comprehensively manage customer value will be better able to retain students, increase retention, and strengthen their reputation amidst increasingly fierce competition.

That brand value has an important meaning for several reasons, namely: it will give rise to *behavioral intention* which is characterized by repurchase intention, willingness to revisit, creating loyalty and being able to create strong differentiation, recommending others to buy, conveying positive things about the institution, being able to reach the targeted segment, strengthening product positioning and making it easier to formulate marketing strategies. Based on this description, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₃: Customer value influences student satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a central construct in the study of service marketing, including in the private universities sector, indicating the extent to which student expectations are met or even exceeded by the services provided by private universities institutions. Theories of customer satisfaction in private universities generally refer to the model *American Customer Satisfaction Index* (ACSI) and the SERVQUAL approach, which states that satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of service quality, perceived value, and students' initial expectations. When the service provided meets or exceeds expectations, students will be satisfied, which in turn drives positive WOM.

Research shows that student satisfaction is influenced by various dimensions of service quality, such as dimensions *tangibles*, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *assurance*, and *empathy*. These dimensions have been empirically proven to contribute significantly to the level of satisfaction, with reliability and assurance often a dominant factor. Furthermore, non-service factors such as social and psychological support, student participation in decision-making, teaching quality, curriculum relevance, and an inclusive campus environment also play a significant role in shaping student satisfaction (Farihah et al., 2024; Litasari, 2024; Rikhotso & Musandiwa, 2024; Setiawan & Rohanda, 2025)



Student satisfaction is also seen as the result of a comparison between expectations and the reality of the service received. If the quality of service exceeds expectations, then “*positive disconfirmation*” which leads to high satisfaction. Conversely, if the service does not meet expectations, students feel dissatisfied, which can lead to complaints, churn, or even negative word-of-mouth (WOM). Several studies also show that student satisfaction is influenced not only by academic services but also by the learning experience, administrative services, and the institution's readiness to face digital change (R. Hapsari et al., 2017a; Rikhotso & Musandiwa, 2024)

Conceptually, student satisfaction is considered an important mediator between

service quality and behavioral consequences such as loyalty, retention, and the intention to recommend the institution to others. Satisfied students tend to stay at the institution, are more loyal, and actively provide positive word of mouth (WOM), which ultimately strengthens the reputation and attractiveness of the institution. Therefore, strategies to improve student satisfaction should be a top priority for universities, both private and public, to maintain the competitiveness and sustainability of the institution (R. Hapsari et al., 2017a; Rikhotso & Musandiwa, 2024). Based on the above description, the following hypothesis can be proposed: **H₄**: Customer satisfaction influences *Word-of-Mouth* (WOM)

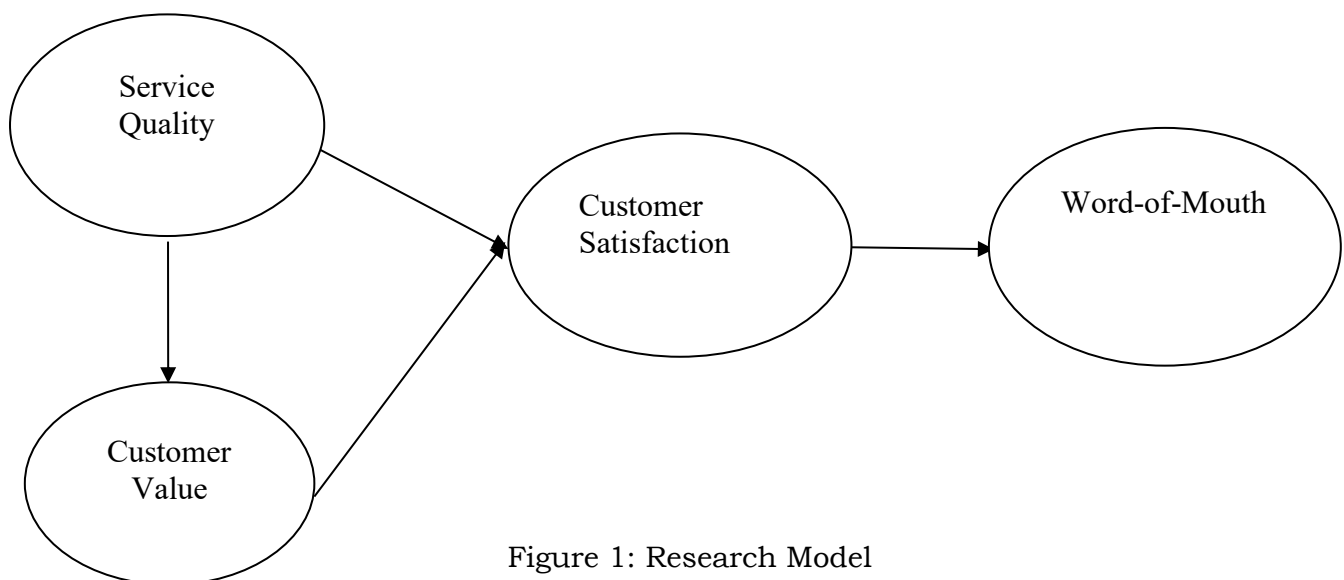


Figure 1: Research Model

Hypothesis testing uses the t-test, with criterion hypothesis decision making accepted if the calculated t is greater than the t table, also by looking at the level of significance, this is if the significance is <0.05

RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this study was quantitative. This study sampled students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, a private university in Gresik, which faces the dynamics of student admissions. The sample consisted of 200 students, using non-probability sampling with accidental sampling. In this sampling technique, the sample members are students who have completed their second semester or more. Measurements are carried out using a Likert scale with a range of numbers 1 for statements very disagree to 5 for strongly agree. In order to meet the requirements of the analysis conducted in this study, the Likert scale used can be treated as an interval scale.

Before testing with multiple linear regression, the best unbiased linear test was carried out, namely multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, autocorrelation and normality tests. Likewise, instrument tests were carried out, in this case questionnaires or indicators and variables

used with instrument testing, namely validity-reliability.

This research data analysis used an inferential method to test the research objectives. The aim was to determine the influence and level of significance of the independent variables on the dependent variable through regression analysis. The research model is presented in Figure 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the data in this study, an inferential method was used to test the research objectives. The aim was to determine the influence and level of significance of the independent variables on the dependent variable through regression analysis. However, the demographic data of the respondents showed that the respondents in this study numbered 200 students. Based on gender, the respondents were dominated by female students at 54%, while male students were 46%. Viewed by semester, the majority of respondents were in semesters 6 and 8, indicating that respondents had sufficient experience in assessing service quality and perceived value. Based on region of origin, the majority of respondents came from Gresik Regency (62%), while the rest came from outside Gresik Regency (38%).

Furthermore, the regression analysis was carried out, the resulting data was first



measured using an instrument, with the result that the 20 indicators as variable measures were stated to have the ability to measure what was to be measured because the calculated r value was greater than the table r value, while the results of the reliability test also concluded that the variable measurements had consistent use at different times.

The results of the econometric test produced data processing results that the tolerance value was greater than 0.10 and the VIF was less than 10, so it was concluded that there was no multicollinearity between the variables studied, the results of the heteroscedasticity test showed that the data scatter plot does not form a certain pattern so that heteroscedasticity does not occur. Test results autocorrelation It is known that the Durbin Watson value is 1.769 while the du value is 1.769. as much as 1.715, so the $4-du$ value is 2.285 so that the durbin watson value is between the du value and $4-du$ so it can be concluded that there is no autocorrelation, the results of the data normality test show that the comparison between observation data with a distribution that approaches a normal distribution does not occur skewness and kurtosis. The conclusion of the econometric test is that the data used has met the assumptions for processing with multiple regression, so that the next stage of analysis can be carried out.

Testing using a regression model is divided into three equations, namely 1) $X_2 = b + b_1X_1 + e$, 2) $AND_1 = b + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + e$ and 3) $Y_2 = b_0 + b_3AND_1 + e$. In answering the research objectives, data analysis was carried out based on equations 1, 2 and 3 which have been explained previously, as described below:

1. To find out and analyze the influence of service quality on customer value in students, presented in table 1. The results of data processing for the regression equation is $X_2 = 4.675 + 0.351 X_1$, meaning that if X_1 (service quality) increases by one point then it will increase X_2 (customer value) of 3.51 points, and if the value of X_1 is 0 then the value of X_2 is equal to 4.675. And the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 15.2 means the change in the value of X_2 can be explained by service quality of 15.2 while 84.8 is explained by other variables such as awareness and other which is not available in this model.

To determine and analyze the influence of customer value and service quality on student satisfaction, it is presented in the following table 2. It is known that the regression equation is $Y_1 = 2.443 + 0.299X_1 + 0.595X_2$, meaning that if X_1 (service quality) increases by one hundred percent then it will increase Y_1 (customer or student satisfaction) of 29.9 percent with the assumption that variable X_2 (customer value) has a

constant value, so too when X_2 (customer value) increases by one hundred percent then it will increase Y_1 (customer satisfaction) of 59.5 percent with the assumption that variable service quality has a fixed value. For Y_1 it will have a value of 2.443 if the value of X_1 and X_2 has a value of 0, meaning that there is no quality service and the value obtained by customers is 2.443. As well as the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 51.9 means the change in the Y value₁ can be explained by service quality and customer value of 51.9 percent while 48.1 is explained by variables others that are not discussed in this research model.

2. To find out and analyze the influence of student satisfaction on *Word-of-Mouth* (WOM) which is presented in the following table 3. It is known that the regression equation is $Y_2 = 6.880 + 0.710 Y_1$, meaning that if Y_1 (student satisfaction) increases by one hundred percent, it will increase Y_2 (Word-of-Mouth (WOM)) of 71 percent, and if the Y value is 0 then the value of Y_2 the same, only 6,880. And the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 39.2 percent means the change in the Y value₂ can be explained by customer satisfaction of 39.2 while 60.8 is explained by variables other than those not found in this model.

Hypothesis testing with the t-test is based on table at a significance of 0.05 which is described as follows:

- a. Testing the hypothesis that service quality has an effect on customer value in students, it is known that the t-table value with degrees of freedom of 75 is 1.992, while the calculated t-value is 3.673 at a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$ thus supporting the proposed H1.
- b. Testing the hypothesis that customer value influences student satisfaction in students, it is known that the t-table value with degrees of freedom of 75 is 1.992, while the calculated t-value is 3.479 at a significance level of $0.001 < 0.05$ thus supporting the proposed H3.
- c. Testing the hypothesis that service quality has an effect on customer satisfaction among students, it is known that the t-table value with degrees of freedom of 75 is 1.992, while the calculated t-value is 6.216 at a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$ so that it supports the proposed H2
- d. Testing the hypothesis of customer satisfaction influencing *Word-of-Mouth* (WOM) In students, it is known that the t-table value with degrees of freedom of 75 is 1.992, while the calculated t-value is 6.953

at a significance level of 0.000.<0.05

so that it supports the proposed H4.

Table 1
 Analysis of Service Quality Data on Customer Value

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(constant)	4.675	2.130		2.195	0.031
X ₁	0.351	0.096	0.390	3.673	0.000

R= 0.390

R Square= 0.152

Adjusted R Square = 0.141

Std Error of the estimate= 3.60740

Dependent variable: X₂

Table 2
 Data Processing of Service Quality against Customer Value

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(constant)	2.443	1.821		1.341	0.184
X ₁	0.299	0.086	0.305	3.479	0.001
X ₂	0.595	0.096	0.544	6.216	0.000

R = 0.720

R Square= 0.519

Adjusted R Square = 0.506

Std Error of the estimate= 2.99032

Dependent variable: Y₁

Table 3
 Data Processing of Service Quality against Customer Value

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		aStandardized coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(constant)	6.880	1.723		3.992	0.000
AND ₁	0.710	0.102	0.626	6.953	0.000

R= 0.626

R Square= 0.392

Adjusted R Square = 0.384

Std Error of the estimate= 3.78740

Dependent variable: Y₂

Discussion

Service Quality Affects Customer Value

The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that service quality has a positive and significant effect on students' perceived value. This finding indicates that improving the quality of service provided by private universities institutions directly improves students' perceptions of the value they receive from educational services. Therefore, the first hypothesis in this study is accepted.

The findings of this study are in line with the concept of customer value (*customer value*) proposed by R. Hapsari et al., (2017) which shows that service quality has a significant influence on customer value in private universities institutions. The study confirms that students assess service quality as a key indicator in evaluating whether the education costs they incur are commensurate with the benefits obtained. Similar findings were put forward by Litasari, (2024) who stated that service quality plays an important role in shaping students' perceptions of value for money, especially in Private Private universities Institutions that face limited resources.

Furthermore, Khusaini & Hartono, (2024) emphasized that consistent and responsive service quality can enhance perceived value through positive student experiences, both in academic and non-academic services. This demonstrates that

service quality serves not only to meet operational standards but also as a source of competitive advantage in creating value for students.

Thus, the results of this study reinforce and support previous theory and empirical findings that service quality is a key antecedent of customer value. Improving service quality is a crucial strategy for private universities institutions to enhance student perceptions of value and strengthen institutional competitiveness.

Customer Value Influences Student Satisfaction

The results of the second hypothesis test indicate that service quality has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction. This finding indicates that improving the quality of service provided by private universities institutions can directly increase student satisfaction levels. Therefore, the second hypothesis in this study is accepted.

The results of this study are consistent with the concept of customer satisfaction, which states that satisfaction is the result of comparing perceived service performance with customer expectations (Rimiyati & Rahmadhani, 2024). In the context of private universities, students, as users of educational services, evaluate various aspects of the service, both academic and non-academic. Teaching quality, faculty competence, facility availability, and ease of

administrative services are important factors influence student perceptions of institutional performance.

This finding aligns with research by Suryaman & Tukiran, (2025) which states that service quality is one of the main determinants of student satisfaction in private universities. The study confirmed that service quality dimensions, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, significantly contribute to student satisfaction. This suggests that the better a university meets student needs and expectations, the higher the perceived level of satisfaction.

Furthermore, the results of this study support the findings of R. Hapsari et al., (2017b) which state that service quality has a positive effect on student satisfaction at private universities institutions in Indonesia. Students who experience adequate academic and administrative services tend to evaluate the institution positively, despite limitations in certain aspects. In the increasingly competitive environment among private universities, student satisfaction is a crucial indicator of successful educational service management.

Thus, the results of this study confirm that service quality plays a role not only in meeting operational standards but also as a key strategy in increasing student satisfaction. Universities need to continuously evaluate and improve service

quality to meet student expectations and maintain institutional competitiveness.

Service Quality Affects Customer Satisfaction

The results of the third hypothesis test indicate that customer value has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction. This finding indicates that the higher the perceived value of the educational services received by students, the higher the level of student satisfaction. Thus, the third hypothesis in this study is accepted and supports the framework theoretical used in research.

The results of this study align with the concept of customer value proposed by (Rimiyati & Rahmadhani, 2024), who state that value is a customer's overall evaluation of the benefits received relative to the sacrifices made. In the context of private universities, students evaluate whether the quality of learning, academic facilities, and support services they receive are commensurate with the cost of education. When perceived benefits exceed or at least balance the costs and effort expended, students tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction.

Empirically, these results are consistent with previous studies that found value to be a key predictor of satisfaction and behavioral intentions in private universities. Litasari, (2024); Putri & Kristiningsih, (2024) also confirmed that customer value

strengthens student satisfaction and loyalty when mediated by trust—meaning that increased perceived value directly increases satisfaction evaluations. The relatively large coefficients in these studies indicate that institutional efforts to improve value for money (e.g., curriculum relevance, availability of supporting facilities, and quality learning experiences) will have a substantial impact on student satisfaction.

Furthermore, Khusaini & Hartono, (2024) emphasized that high perceived value strengthens student satisfaction because students feel they made the right decision in choosing a university. This finding reinforces the position of customer value as a key variable in explaining student satisfaction.

Thus, the results of this study support previous theory and empirical findings that customer value plays a significant role in shaping student satisfaction. Improving perceived value should be a strategic focus for private universities institutions in efforts to increase student satisfaction and retention.

Customer Satisfaction Affects Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

The results of the fourth hypothesis test indicate that student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on word-of-mouth (WOM). This finding indicates that students who are satisfied with the educational services they receive tend to

convey positive recommendations to others, both verbally and through digital media. Thus, the fourth hypothesis in this study is accepted and supports the framework theoretical which is used.

These findings align with the literature consensus that positions satisfaction as a key antecedent of consumer (Casidy & Wymer, 2015; Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016), who emphasized that student satisfaction plays a strategic role in driving positive WOM, particularly in private universities that rely on recommendations as a low-cost marketing strategy. Furthermore, (Hussain et al., 2015) stated that student satisfaction not only drives WOM but also strengthens the institution's image through real experiences shared by students. Thus, the results of this study strengthen previous theory and empirical evidence that student satisfaction is a key factor in the formation of positive WOM. Increasing student satisfaction is an important strategy for universities in building a sustainable reputation and competitiveness.

The results of the study show that service quality and customer value play an important role in shaping student satisfaction and encouraging *Word-of-Mouth* Positive word of mouth (WOM). Therefore, private universities administrators, particularly private universities, need to prioritize continuous improvement in the quality of academic and

non-academic services. This can be achieved through improving lecturer competency, optimizing administrative services, and providing adequate learning facilities. Furthermore, universities need to ensure a balance between educational costs and student benefits to enhance perceived value and strengthen satisfaction as a WOM-based marketing strategy. This research contributes theoretically to strengthening the relationship model between service quality, customer value, student satisfaction, and *Word-of-Mouth* in the context of private universities. These findings support service marketing theory, which positions service quality as an antecedent of customer value and satisfaction, and satisfaction as a primary determinant of WOM. Furthermore, this study confirms the role of customer value as a significant variable in explaining student satisfaction. Thus, this study enriches the literature on educational services marketing, particularly in private universities in Indonesia, and supports the empirical validity of the model used.

This study is limited by its scope, which only covers one faculty at a private university. Therefore, generalization of the results requires caution. The accidental sampling technique has the potential to introduce bias into the representation of respondents. Furthermore, the cross-sectional research design is unable to capture dynamic changes in student

perceptions of service quality, customer value, and satisfaction over time. Future research is recommended to involve more universities or faculties to increase the generalizability of the findings. The use of probability sampling techniques and a longitudinal design is also recommended to obtain more representative and dynamic results. Furthermore, model development by adding variables such as institutional image, trust, student engagement, and digital experience is expected to enrich the study of word-of-mouth in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the relationship between service quality, customer value, student satisfaction, and *Word-of-Mouth* (WOM) in Private Universities. Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion that have been conducted, it can be concluded that all research hypotheses are accepted and show a positive and significant relationship between variables studied. The results showed that service quality has a positive and significant effect on customer value. This finding confirms that good service quality, both in academic and non-academic aspects, can improve students' perceptions of the value they receive from the institution. Furthermore, service quality was also shown to have a direct effect on



student satisfaction, indicating that meeting and even exceeding student expectations is a key factor in creating satisfaction with educational services. Furthermore, this study found that customer value has a strong influence on student satisfaction. This indicates that students not only evaluate service quality separately but also consider the appropriateness between the benefits received and the costs incurred. High

perceived value was shown to increase students' positive evaluations of their learning experience. Another important finding is that student satisfaction has a significant effect on positive WOM. Satisfied students tend to recommend their institution to others, both directly and through digital media. Thus, student satisfaction plays a strategic role between service quality, customer value, and WOM as an effective form of marketing.

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