CATALYSTS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH BEHAVIOR: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SERVICE QUALITY, BRAND IMAGE, AND STUDENT COMMITMENT AT UNIVERSITAS PUTRA INDONESIA 'YPTK' PADANG

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Abstract: This study aims to assess the concurrent and partial effects of Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment on Word of Mouth (WOM) behavior within the context of Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang. Data was collected through a survey employing questionnaires distributed to a sample of 100 respondents. Utilizing multiple regression analysis and correlation techniques, the research findings indicate that Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment collectively contribute to the prediction of Word of Mouth behavior. Individually, each factor also demonstrates significant influence on WOM behavior, as demonstrated by the computed t-values exceeding the critical t-values at a significance level (α) of less than 0.05. The outcomes of the simultaneous hypothesis test (F-test) further underscore that the combined influence of Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment significantly affects WOM behavior. This is evident from the calculated F-value surpassing the critical F-value, with a significance level of less than 0.05. In conclusion, the research substantiates the substantive influence of Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment on Word of Mouth behavior within the milieu of Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang. Furthermore, these factors collectively account for a considerable proportion of the observed WOM behavior, as illuminated by the coefficient of determination

Keywords: *Service, Quality, Word-of-Mouth, Brand, Comitment*

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1. Introduction

Education is an intrinsic need for individuals to integrate effectively into society. With the proliferation of educational institutions in Indonesia, particularly universities, the competition among them has become remarkably intense. Universities are now strategically focused on both attracting potential students and retaining current ones, fostering a culture where students naturally recommend the institution to their peers. This advocacy hinges on maintaining impeccable service quality to establish a strong and positive brand image, which, in turn, cultivates unwavering student commitment, eventually manifesting as a desire to enthusiastically endorse the institution.

This dynamic is vividly evident at Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang. As an educational institution operated under the aegis of a foundation, UPI "YPTK" profoundly acknowledges the indispensable role of education as a primary societal need. Education is the cornerstone of individual advancement. Within this context, the inextricable link between educational institutions and the provision of conducive learning environments becomes unmistakable. Over successive years, Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang has consistently evolved and augmented its facilities, thus enhancing its distinctiveness in comparison to other private universities.

A preliminary exploration has unearthed several inherent strengths of UPI "YPTK," including: Comprehensive Facilities: UPI "YPTK" boasts an array of comprehensive facilities, providing students with a well-rounded educational experience. Character Education Prowess: UPI "YPTK" has been selected among the esteemed top ten universities in Indonesia entrusted by the government to champion character education, underscoring its commitment to holistic student development. Spiritual Foundation: The regular recitation of the Asmaul Husna and the recital of the 12 Fundamental Principles of UPI "YPTK" at the commencement of each academic session underscore its spiritually grounded campus environment, fostering a unique sense of community. Health-Conscious Campus: UPI "YPTK" champions a "SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS" policy, demonstrative of its genuine concern for student well-being and the environment.

Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang stands as a prime example of a private university that consistently witnesses a growing influx of new students year after year, particularly within the esteemed Management department. The escalating demand for higher education has engendered fierce competition among universities. Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang has leveraged its commitment to a conducive learning environment, character education, student welfare, and distinct policies to shape its reputation, resulting in a continuous and commendable surge in student enrollment. This noteworthy growth is thought to be driven by UPI YPTK's commendable service quality, positive brand image, and the commitment of its students to advocate through word-of-mouth recommendations to peers, friends, and family. This encouragement aims to sway them towards selecting UPI YPTK for their academic pursuits, particularly within the realm of management. This is also supported by several studies that service quality had a significant influence on word of mouth (WOM) (Widyastuti & Istiqomawati, 2021) (Punkyanti & Seminari, 2020) (Christian & Setiobudi, 2023). While Anita et al., (2020), (Syuhada & Hidayat, 2022) found that brand image has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction

However, it's essential to note that while these factors contribute to positive sentiments, they might not guarantee UPI YPTK always securing top recommendations or exclusively receiving favorable endorsements. This is underscored by student grievances, including Inconsistent Schedule Management: Issues with transparent communication regarding changes in class schedules by specific faculty members, which can lead to clashes in timings and classroom Overcrowding, the presence of an excessive number of students in a single classroom, adversely affecting the efficacy and efficiency of the teaching-learning process.

In light of these dynamics, this research endeavors to address several pivotal questions: How does the level of service quality at UPI YPTK influence the word-of-mouth behavior exhibited among students within the Faculty of Economics, specifically those in the Management Department? How does UPI YPTK's brand image influence and shape the word-of-mouth behavior within the cohort of students from the Faculty of Economics, focusing on the Management Department?. How does the depth of commitment demonstrated

by UPI YPTK's students influence the patterns of word-of-mouth behavior observed among peers within the Faculty of Economics, specifically the Management Department?. What is the cumulative impact that the joint forces of service quality, brand image, and student commitment at UPI YPTK exert on the word-of-mouth behavior displayed among students within the Faculty of Economics, concentrating on the Management Department?

In essence, this study seeks to elucidate the intricate connections between these elements and their consequent effects on the word-of-mouth behavior exhibited among students within the Faculty of Economics, with a specific focus on the Management Department at UPI YPTK Padang

Operational Variable
Service Quality

According to Lovelock and Wright (2007) service quality begins with understanding customer needs and concludes with their perceptions. Customer expectations are shaped by past experiences and word-of-mouth communication, which are then compared. Customer focus on service quality is significant when consuming goods or services. Favorable customer experiences are often associated with high service quality. Companies should enhance service quality to retain customers(Affandi & Darmastuti, 2011).(Lovelock & Wright, 2011) detail that customers assess service quality through five dimensions, Tangibles: Pertains to the visible aspects like employee appearance and physical facilities, equipment, and materials that support service delivery. Empathy: Involves individualized attention, displaying characteristics such as approachability, protection, and understanding of customers' desires, needs, and emotions. Reliability: Ensures accurate and dependable delivery of promised services. Responsiveness: Encompasses willingness and promptness to assist customers, ensuring timely service delivery. Assurance: Focuses on employee knowledge, courtesy, and trustworthiness. This dimension includes compensation for service, politeness, and respect for customers.

Brand Image

Kotler and Lane (2012) define Brand Image as customers' perceptions and beliefs shaped by their experiences, forming a mental summary of the brand. They proposed measuring brand image based on three aspects: a. Strength: Denotes physical attributes unique to the brand. This distinctiveness sets it apart from others and includes factors like functionality, appearance, price, and broad market coverage. b. Uniqueness: Focuses on differentiation. It's driven by attributes that distinguish the brand, such as distinctive names or appearances, making it memorable. c. Favorability: Relates to customer trust and perception alignment with the desired corporate image. Outwersoot and Tudorica (2012), as cited in Darmawat, (2015), explain that brand image encompasses interconnected perceptions and associations related to a brand, residing within individuals' minds. Kotler &. Drawing from these theories, the following brand image indicators are established: Strength of UPI YPTK's Brand Image, Uniqueness of UPI YPTK Compared to Competing Institutions, Favorable Attributes Associated with UPI YPTK.

Student Commitment

Barnes (2003:150), as cited in (Murti, 2013), defines commitment as a psychological state reflecting dependence on a relationship. Sugiyarmasto's research (2009), as cited in Juwita (2015), outlines commitment's influencing factors are Satisfaction Level: Key

components include: a. Meeting essential needs with valuable outcomes. b. Comparing alternatives based on qualitative expectations. Investment Level, the commitment is linked to the investment, motivating nurtured relationships. Trust: Trust underpins commitment. It signifies reliance on others' abilities and motivations. Based on these theories, the following indicators of customer commitment at UPI YPTK are relationship commitment, sustained relationship concern, maximum effort in maintaining the relationship.

Word of Mouth Behavior

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is a natural conversation between individuals about information regarding a product that is considered to have a greater influence than formal advertising and marketing (Ansis et al., 2021). According to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), word of mouth marketing entails the deliberate dissemination of information from one consumer to another. In alignment with WOMMA's framework, Word of Mouth Marketing involves incentivizing customers to engage in discussions regarding one's products and services, thereby facilitating the organic dissemination of these conversations. This practice is regarded as an amalgamation of both the art and science of constructing mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-producer communications.

WOMMA elucidates two distinct manifestations of Word of Mouth, first Organic Word of Mouth, it signifies the spontaneous occurrence of interpersonal communication, where contented consumers voluntarily express their contentment towards a particular product or service. (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007) as elucidated by (Hidayati et al., 2013) underscore that communication bridges the connection between consumers and producers, while also interlinking consumers with their social milieu. This encompasses marketing communication originating from both commercial entities and consumers themselves. Strategies aimed at fostering Organic Word of Mouth are Prioritizing customer satisfaction, enhancing product/service quality and utility, responsively addressing concerns and critiques, facilitating open dialogues and attentive listening, cultivating customer loyalty through strategic engagement, cultivating consumer trust that engenders enduring commitment

Second, Amplified Word of Mouth, it constitutes orchestrated endeavors by corporations to stimulate the dissemination of word of mouth interactions. This is achieved through orchestrated campaigns designed to expedite the proliferation of information about their products among consumers. Corporations strive to disseminate information that acquaints the public with their offerings, culminating in subsequent purchases. Mechanisms bolstering Amplified Word of Mouth encompass: establishing cohesive communities, pioneering tools that empower individuals to share insights, enlisting advocates and information propagators to actively endorse products, furnishing advocates with shareable information, employing strategic maneuvers or publicity stunts to ignite discourse and catalyze discussions, identifying and engaging with influential individuals and target communities, engaging in systematic research and monitoring of digital conversations

Ali (2013) delineates four foundational tenets that marketers must adhere to in order to engender word of mouth discussions pertaining to products or services within a word of mouth marketing paradigm: Cultivating Intrigue: This involves the creation of offerings characterized by captivating attributes or distinctive attributes that engender consumer fascination, ranging from innovative packaging to comprehensive product guarantees. Fostering Consumer Satisfaction by delivering remarkable products, excellent services, and adeptly addressing challenges, companies can imbue their clientele with a sense of vigor, enthusiasm, and devotion, thus inciting them to propagate their experiences to peers.

Cultivating Trust and Esteem: Establishing consumer trust and respect constitutes a pivotal facet. Fostering unwavering commitment to disseminated information breeds consumer confidence, emboldening them to propagate product narratives among their social circles. Lastly Streamlining Advocacy: Facilitating ease of discourse is imperative. Simplifying the process through which consumers can share product or service details with brevity and efficacy, such as employing succinct messaging, can significantly enhance propagation. The indices of Word of Mouth can be distilled from the aforementioned theoretical discourse as follows: pleasure derived from recommending to others, persuasive influence over others' enrollment decisions and the frequency and regularity of Word of Mouth interactions.

2. Research Method

The research conducted is quantitative, employing the non-probability sampling technique of saturation sampling. One of the methods employed to determine the sample size is by utilizing the Slovin formula. For this study, the determined sample size is 2133 respondents. However, applying the Slovin formula results in a sample size of 100 students.

The data source is gathered through questionnaire distribution among students of the Faculty of Economics, Department of Management, Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang. Data collected is analyzed using multiple correlation, multiple regression, and coefficient of determination (R^2) methods. Hypothesis testing will be carried out through t-test and F-test analyses.(Sugiyono, 2017)

3. Results and Discussion

Upon conducting the research and collecting data, the gathered data was processed using SPSS Version 21, resulting in the following data interpretations:

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength of the relationship between one variable and another. The simple correlation values between Quality of Service, Brand Image, and Student Commitment to Word of Mouth behavior. Quality of Service has a moderate correlation of 0.760 with a significance level of 0.000, Brand Image has a moderate correlation of 0.689 with a significance level of 0.000, and Student Commitment has a strong correlation of 0.693 with a significance level of 0.000. Through multiple correlations between Quality of Service, Brand Image, Student Commitment, and Word of Mouth behavior, it is evident that there exists a robust correlation, with a coefficient value of 0.862. This observation underscores a significantly potent interconnection among the dimensions of Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment in relation to the manifestation of Word of Mouth behavioral tendencies.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined influence of independent variables, namely Quality of Service (X1), Brand Image (X2), and Student Commitment (X3), on the dependent variable, Word of Mouth behavior (Y). The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = 3.032 + 0.253X1 + 0.284X2 + 0.273X3 + e$$

From the multiple regression equation, it can be concluded that the constant term indicates that when Quality of Service, Brand Image, and Student Commitment are absent, Word of

Mouth behavior remains constant at 3.032. The positive regression coefficient of 0.253 indicates that a one-unit increase in Quality of Service, with Brand Image and Student Commitment held constant, leads to a 0.253 increase in Word of Mouth behavior. The positive regression coefficient of 0.284 indicates that a one-unit increase in Brand Image, with Quality of Service and Student Commitment held constant, results in a 0.284 increase in Word of Mouth behavior. The positive regression coefficient of 0.273 implies that a one-unit increase in Student Commitment, with Quality of Service and Brand Image held constant, leads to a 0.273 increase in Word of Mouth behavior.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Analysis

The coefficient of determination analysis is utilized to determine the percentage of variance in the dependent variable (Word of Mouth behavior) that can be explained by the combined influence of the independent variables: Quality of Service (X1), Brand Image (X2), and Student Commitment (X3). The Adjusted R Square value is 0.736, indicating that 73.6% of the variance in Word of Mouth behavior is contributed by the combined effect of Quality of Service, Brand Image, and Student Commitment, while the remaining 26.4% is influenced by other variables outside the scope of this study.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing, both partial and simultaneous, was performed as detailed in the following table:

a) Partial Hypothesis Testing (t-test)

The analysis involving individual variables' impact on Word of Mouth Behavior (Y) yielded the following outcomes: Impact of Service Quality (X1) on Word of Mouth Behavior (Y): The computed t-value for Service Quality was found to be 5.175, while the tabulated t-value stood at 1.985. Notably, the calculated t-value exceeded the tabulated counterpart (5.175 > 1.985), and the significance level was well below the specified alpha threshold (0.000 > 0.05). This substantial divergence led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Ha). Thus result supported by Ansis et al. (2021), Affandi & Darmastuti, 2011) who stated that all dimensions of service quality, namely Tangible, Empathy, Responsiveness, Reliability, and Assurance, have a direct and indirect impact on Word of Mouth.

Influence of Brand Image (X2) on Word of Mouth Behavior (Y): In the context of Brand Image's impact, the calculated t-value amounted to 4.238, surpassing the tabulated t-value of 1.985. Concurrently, the significance level was significantly lower than the alpha level (0.000 < 0.05). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) was negated in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Ha). Similar result also found by Syuhada & Hidayat (2022) .

Effect of Student Commitment (X3) on Word of Mouth Behavior (Y): The analysis concerning Student Commitment's influence resulted in a calculated t-value of 6.089, which was notably lower than the tabulated t-value of 1.985. Moreover, the significance level was considerably below the stipulated alpha threshold (0.000 < 0.05). As a result, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, in support of the alternative hypothesis (Ha). Wang & Chang (2013) show that various forms of perceived justice influence trust or/and commitment, which in turn lead to positive word-of-mouth promotion.

b) Collective Hypothesis Testing (F-test)

Furthermore, the joint analysis of all variables' combined impact on Word of Mouth Behavior (Y) yielded the following results, The regression model exhibited the following figures: Sum of Squares (Regression) = 1793.062, Degrees of Freedom = 3, Mean Square = 597.687, F statistic = 92.830, and a significant p-value of 0.000. This computed F statistic significantly exceeded the critical F value (92.830 > 2.71), and the p-value was markedly below the 5% threshold. Consequently, the null hypothesis (Ho) was refuted in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Ha). This collectively underscores the substantive and statistically significant influence of Service Quality, Brand Image, and Student Commitment on Word of Mouth Behavior.

4. Conclusion

Conclusion Based on the conducted research on the Influence of Quality of Service, Brand Image, and Student Commitment on Word of Mouth Behavior at Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, the following conclusions can be drawn. Quality of Service has a positive and significant influence on Word of Mouth Behavior. Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Word of Mouth Behavior.Student Commitment has a positive and significant influence on Word of Mouth Behavior.The combined influence of Quality of Service, Brand Image, and Student Commitment significantly affects Word of Mouth Behavior.

We also propose several recommendations :

For Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang:

Enhance Student Commitment by facilitating alumni job search through collaborations with companies and providing job vacancy links on the university's website.Improve Quality of Service by ensuring clear communication of class schedules to prevent clashes. Strengthen Brand Image through maintaining accreditation and university traditions.

For future researchers.

Consider introducing additional variables to account for the remaining 25.6% of variance in Word of Mouth behavior that is influenced by other factors not explored in this study. The translation and improvements have aimed to maintain the scientific rigor and clarity of the original text while enhancing its coherence and readability.

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