

# THE SATISFACTION AS MEDIATION TO INCREASE ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH AT PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) mainly represents how consumers and former consumers perceive particular products or companies. The related information could be easily accessed by people through the media of the internet. Similarly, EWM in universities conducted by students is still not effective, it is evident that there is still low acceptance of new students at the institution. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate the direct and indirect influence of service quality on student EWM and student satisfaction. The AMOS Program was used to identify the influence between the aforementioned variables. A sample of 150 active student samples from five universities in Medan, Indonesia were sampled. The results showed the direct influence of service quality on EWM of 0.224 and the indirect influence of service quality on EWM through the satisfaction of 0.367. So that the indirect influence through satisfaction is greater than the direct influence between the service quality on EWM.*

**Keywords:** Satisfaction as Mediation, Electronic Word of Mouth, Private Higher Education.

**JEL Classification:** I23, M31

## INTRODUCTION

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) is the impact of the development of communication technology in internet media (Adjei, et al, 2010); (Zhu, F. & Zhang, 2010); (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Similarly, students to prospective students in universities have conducted EWM in promoting their place of study to others via the internet. Students have not been maximally doing EWM because they consider the services they receive have not been following expectations, such as facilities provided by institutions are still lacking and far from their expectations. Still, the lack of quality of service received by students causes them to be less satisfied and as a result, they have not done a positive EWM even negative EWM that occur related to the services received during their studies.

Previous research has found that quality of service significantly influences Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) and is also related to satisfaction. Such research was conducted by (Chanitakis & Lymperopoulos, 2009); (Handayanto, 2018); (Susilowati & Yasri, 2019); who revealed that satisfaction performs a particular role related to mediation between the quality of service and EWM. Rozano & Pamungkas (2017) in their research revealed considerable facts

related to the accuracy of influence from service quality to student satisfaction at private universities in Jakarta. Furthermore, Maeriyana, et al (2019); Hasan (2008) stated in their research that the positive and significant influence of the quality service on student satisfaction was identified. From the existing theories and the findings of previous research, it is seen that the empirical issues contradict the existing theories, which particularly occur at private universities in Medan. Therefore, this study wants to be studied from the perspective of students whether the existing theory can be applied to private universities in Medan. Then, the current study attempts to provide a general overview on if students of private universities in Medan will do positive EWM about their university.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The current study outlines a model which particularly accommodates the research-based knowledge on quality services, student satisfaction, and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM).

### **Service Quality**

In general, service quality is made up of multi-dimensions which function as assessment components of the quality of the service (Parasuraman, et al, 1988). Besides, it is mainly associated with the difference between how customers initially expect the service to be and how they receive it finally. Then, from the initial multi-dimensional, it ends up being five dimensions in assessing the quality of services consisting of tangible, reliability, responsibility, assurance, and empathy. Each of these dimensions can be developed into several indicators so that the indicators are more measured.

### **Student Satisfaction**

Kotler, et al (2012) defines that satisfaction is primarily associated with customers' positive response after receiving or consuming the product. On the contrary, the negative response indicates customers' dissatisfaction. The customer is satisfied with the product if it performs better than expected. Meanwhile, the customer is dissatisfied or disappointed with the product if it performs worse than expected.

At the time when disappointment appears, the company needs to take an action such as evaluating the product so that the customer is satisfied and the company does not lose customers by moving to another company.

In this study, satisfaction is a mediation variable between service quality and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM). Because of this research in private universities, the satisfaction in question is student satisfaction.

Kotler, et al (2012) divide satisfaction into three dimensions namely: overall satisfaction, confirming between performance and expectations, and comparing customer's opinion about the most ideal product with the performance of the current product.

### **Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM)**

Hennig-Thurau, et al (2004) states that EWM is a form of word of mouth promotion using internet-connected electronic equipment. EWM communication could be conducted in various manners (e.g., discussion forums, website boycotts, web-based opinion platforms, newsgroups). The dimensions of EWM according to Hennig-Thurau, et al (2004) are composed

of 8 dimensions, namely: platform assistance, concern for other economic intensive, helping company, expressing positive emotions, social benefits, advice seeking.

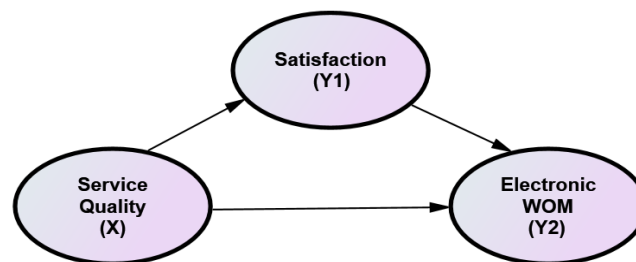
## AIMS, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS, AND HYPOTHESIS

In general, this study aims to see firsthand or indirectly the influence of service quality on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) and satisfaction variables.

In particular, the study aims to:

- 1) To identify and scrutinize the effect of service quality on satisfaction.
- 2) To identify and scrutinize the effect of service quality on EWM.
- 3) To identify and scrutinize the effect of satisfaction on EWM.
- 4) To identify and scrutinize the effect of service quality on EWM through satisfaction.

### Conceptual Research Framework



**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### Hypothesis:

- 1) Service great has a superb and extensive impact on satisfaction.
- 2) Service great has a superb and extensive impact on EWM.
- 3) Satisfaction has a superb and extensive impact on EWM.
- 4) Service great has a superb and extensive impact on EWM through satisfaction.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Population and Sample

This study involved five private universities in Medan, Indonesia, with a sample of 150 samples from students who are still active and have studied for at least 3 semesters. Sampling came from students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Universitas Dharmawangsa, Universitas Al-Wasliyah, Universitas Quality, and Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Wasliyah.

### Data Analysis

In testing, the hypothesis used path analysis techniques. Path analysis is to look at the direct and indirect relationship between exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The tool used in processing data is the AMOS Program.

## RESULTS

The service quality can affect client satisfaction. the standard of service that exceeds shopper expectations can produce satisfaction, and the other way around (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). Besides, the standard of service conjointly affects Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) (Leonnad, et al (2018). This positive relationship is proved in previous studies on services at non-public universities (Leong, et al, 2015). EWM is that the dissemination of data that's done indirectly, not through face-to-face and not in oral kind (Kim, et al, 2018). The media used will be social media and discussion groups. additionally, to the quicker info dissemination method, EWM conjointly protects the private identity of data dissemination (Abubakar, et al, 2017). Customer satisfaction when overwhelming merchandise or services can verify shopper behavior towards the corporate. Glad customers can turn out EWM, which is spreading positive info concerning their expertise when overwhelming merchandise and services so it will influence potential customers to get similar product and services (Wien & Olsen, 2017). Previous studies have tested that there's a positive impact of satisfaction on EWM (Yang, 2017).

**TABLE 1**  
**EVALUATION OF MODEL VALIDITY**

No.	Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	(Loading Factor) <sup>2</sup>	Measurement Error	Construct Reliability	Variance Extracted
1	Service Quality	T1	0.651	0.424	0.576	0.949	0.524
		T2	0.648	0.42	0.58		
		T3	0.662	0.438	0.562		
		T4	0.673	0.453	0.547		
		T5	0.668	0.446	0.554		
		T6	0.639	0.408	0.592		
		Rel1	0.771	0.594	0.406		
		Rel2	0.796	0.634	0.366		
		Rel3	0.854	0.729	0.271		
		Rel4	0.829	0.687	0.313		
		Res1	0.809	0.654	0.346		
		Res2	0.752	0.566	0.434		
		As1	0.743	0.552	0.448		
		As2	0.739	0.546	0.454		
		As3	0.71	0.504	0.496		
		E1	0.655	0.429	0.571		
E2	0.647	0.419	0.581				
2.	Satisfaction	Sat1	0.885	0.783	0.217	0.912	0.776
		Sat2	0.921	0.848	0.152		
		Sat3	0.835	0.697	0.303		

3		Ew1	0.714	0.51	0.49	0.844	0.521
		Ew2	0.762	0.581	0.419		
	Electronic Word of Mouth	Ew3	0.722	0.521	0.479		
	(EWM)	Ew4	0.681	0.464	0.536		
		Ew5	0.726	0.527	0.473		

The calculation result shows that the service quality variable has a construct reliability value of 0.949, satisfaction has a value of 0.912, EWM with a value of 0.844. The construct reliability of the 3 variables is extra than the reduce-off cost of 0.7, so the signs have true inner consistency. Then for the variance extracted value, the service quality variable has a value of 0.524, satisfaction with a value of 0.776, EWM with a value of 0.521. The variance extracted value will be smaller than the construct reliability value. Since all three variables obtain the variance extracted  $> 0.50$ , the variance extracted from the indicators is more for the formation of latent variables.

### Direct Effect

The direct effect can be seen in Table 2 as the following:

TABLE 2 STANDARDIZED DIRECT EFFECTS			
			ESTIMATE
SATISFACTION	<---	SERVICE QUALITY	0.679
EWM	<---	SERVICE QUALITY	0.224
EWM	<---	SATISFACTION	0.54

Based on Table 2. The obtained results could be described as the following:

a) The effect of service quality variables on student satisfaction

$$X \rightarrow Y1 = 0.679.$$

The effect of service quality (X) on satisfaction (Y1) is indicated by a value of 0.679 which means that the service quality positively affects satisfaction, as well as the significance level of  $0.000 < 0.050$  in other words the value of P-value qualifies insignificance at a value of 5%. The results obtained indicate that H1 is accepted.

b) The effect of service quality variables on student Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM)

$$X \rightarrow Y2 = 0.224.$$

The effect of the service quality variable (X) on EWM (Y2) is indicated by a value of 0.224 which means that the quality of the service positively affects EWM, as well as the significance level of  $0.000 < 0.050$  in other words the value of P-value qualifies insignificance at a value of 5%. The results obtained indicate that H2 is accepted.

c) The effect of variable satisfaction on student Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM)

$$Y1 \rightarrow Y2 = 0.540$$

The effect of variable satisfaction (Y1) on EWM (Y2) is indicated by a value of 0.540 which means that satisfaction positively affects EWM, as well as a significance level of  $0.000 < 0.050$

in other words the value of P-value qualifies significantly at a value of 5%. The results obtained indicate that H3 is accepted.

### Indirect Effect

The indirect effect can be seen in Table 3 as the following:

<b>Indirect Effects</b>	<b>Calculation</b>
Service Quality → Satisfaction → EWM	$0.679 \times 0.540 = 0.367$

Indirect effect of service quality variables on student EWM through student satisfaction ( $X \rightarrow Y1 \rightarrow Y2$ ) =  $0.679 \times 0.540 = 0.367$

The indirect effect of service quality (X) on EWM (Y2) mediated by satisfaction (Y1) is indicated by a value of 0.367 which means that the service quality indirectly positively affects EWM (Y1) mediated by satisfaction (Y1). The results obtained indicate that H4 is accepted.

### Total Effect

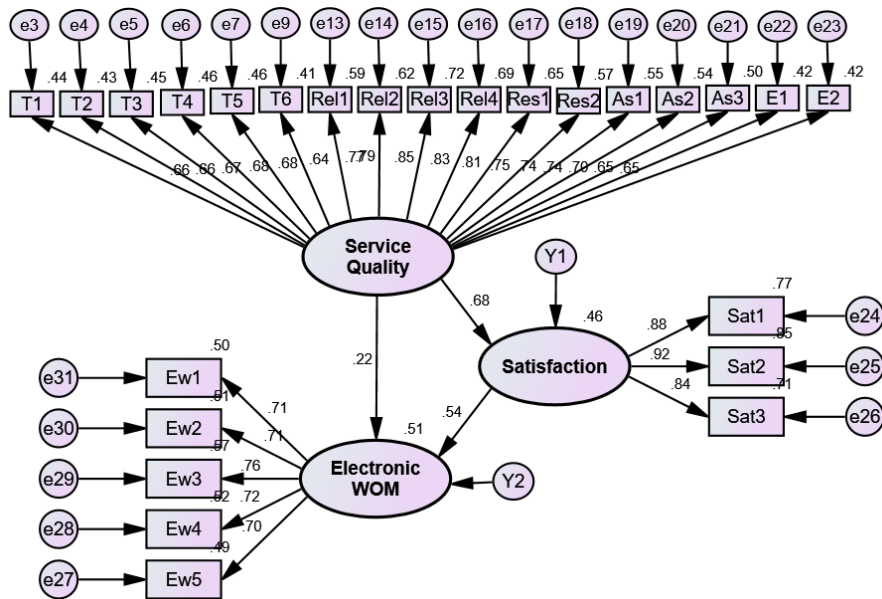
The Total Effect can be seen in Table 4 as follows:

	Service quality	Satisfaction
Satisfaction	0.679	0
EWM	0.591	0.54

The total influence gained by summing up the direct and indirect influence in the model, from the summation of the above influence can be known as the total influence of service quality variables on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) =  $0.224 + (0.679 \times 0.540) = 0.591$ . So the indirect effect of service quality on EWM is mediated by the satisfaction of 0.591.

The total effect gained by summing up the direct and indirect effect in the model, from the summation of the above effect can be known as the total effect of service quality variables on the student's EWM =  $0,224 + (0,679 \times 0,540) = 0,591$

The effect between variables in this research model can be presented in the path diagram in Figure 2.



**FIGURE 2**  
**STRUCTURAL MODEL TEST RESULTS**

**Model Test Results**

The determination coefficient ( $R^2$ ) is used to measure how much an independent variable contributes to a dependent variable. To measure the size of relationships between variables can be seen in Table 5.

	Estimate
Satisfaction	0.461
EWM	0.507

Based on Table 5. The estimated value of Squared Multiple Correlations indicates that the service quality (X) indicates that the service quality contribution to satisfaction (Y1) is 46.1% (estimate = 0.461). Meanwhile, service quality variables (X) contribute to an EWM of 50.7% (estimate = 0.507)

Based on the output results of the variances table (attached) then it can be known variance values in structural equations that can't be explained by models  $e_1$  and  $e_2$ .

	Nilai Variants
$e_1$	0,332
$e_2$	0,209

Furthermore, a model accuracy check can be performed about predictions using a total determination coefficient. Then it can be calculated by the formula:

$$\begin{aligned}
 R^2_m &= 1 - Pe_1^2 - Pe_2^2 \\
 &= 1 - [(0,332)^2 + (0,209)^2] \\
 &= 1 - [0,110 + 0,437] \\
 &= 1 - (0,481) \\
 R^2_m &= 0,952
 \end{aligned}$$

That is, the range of records that may be defined through the version is 95.2% or in different words, the statistics contained withinside the records of 95.2% can be defined through the version, whilst the final 4.8% is defined different variables (now no longer contained withinside the version) and errors.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Effect of Service Quality on Satisfaction**

Student satisfaction was positively and significantly affected by service quality at private universities in Medan. This mainly supports several previous related studies which investigated the pertinent variables in different research settings and focus. For instance, Mahfooz (2014) revealed that the best quality of service significantly determines hypermarket customer satisfaction in Saudi Arabia. In particular, they put more concerns on the dimension of physical aspects or how the hypermarkets look like in terms of the surrounding areas, facilities, equipment, and so forth. Nearly similar to such results, Chandra, et al (2018) identified that student satisfaction is significantly influenced by service quality in terms of the condition of the classroom for learning such as cleanliness and comfort. Additionally, they have similar attention toward the administration service in terms of data accuracy. Reinforcing these data, Africia, et al (2017) concluded that the determination of service quality improvement at the college should consider the satisfaction of the whole university students. Therefore, all the above studies primarily confirm that satisfaction is positively and significantly influenced by service quality.

### **The Effect of Service Quality on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM)**

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) became definitely and substantially tormented by carrier quality at private universities in Medan. This is in line with several previous related studies which investigated the associated variables in different research settings and focus. For instance, Saodin, et al (2019) found that customers will gladly tell people about the service obtained from a particular product or company if it meets their satisfaction, which in this case is related to the service of the Three-Star Hotels. Supporting this claim, Sanjaya & Yasa (2018) generated the same result in the context of hospital service quality in the view of patients from which their satisfaction of the service leads to their willingness of recommending it to the people closest to them. In addition, Wibowo, et al (2019) confirmed a nearly similar conclusion regarding the emergence of certain effects of service quality on customer's EWM. Therefore, all the above studies primarily confirm that EWM is definitely and extensively inspired through carrier quality.



### **The Effect of Satisfaction on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM)**

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) was positively and significantly affected by satisfaction at private universities in Medan. This is in line with several previous related studies which investigated these variables in different research settings and focus. For instance, Govindarajoo, et al (2020) confirmed that students who are in a good relationship with their university that leads to a sense of satisfaction will gratefully spread the act of positive EWM. Supporting this claim, Taghizadeh, et al (2013) affirmed nearly similar results concerning the emergence of certain effects of satisfaction on the EWM communication. Therefore, all the above studies primarily confirm that EWM is positively and significantly influenced by satisfaction.

### **The Effect of Service Quality on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) Path Satisfaction**

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWM) path coefficients delight changed into definitely and extensively affected by service quality at private universities in Medan. This is in line with several previous related studies which investigated the correlated variables in different research settings and focus. For instance, Susilowati & Yasri (2019) stated that service quality significantly influences the tendency of customers to spread a positive EWM to people around them through their initial satisfaction. Supporting this claim, Mestrovic (2018) confirmed nearly similar conclusions in the context of higher education institutions involving students from several different study programs. Moreover, Jiewanto et al (2012) affirmed the same results as concluded by Mestrovic within the context of better training institutions. All of the above research state that EWM was indirectly impacted by positive and significant influence of service quality through satisfaction.

## **CONCLUSION**

The above-explained results confirm several important conclusions regarding the following aspects: The service quality at private universities in Medan has a positive and significant effect directly and indirectly on the electronic word of mouth (EWM) in students. Influence is indirectly mediated by student satisfaction. Indicators of the highest service quality are in the indicators of services provided by private universities equal to each student. So students are satisfied because of the services provided without any difference in status among students. So that starting from the service quality provided that satisfies students will also have an impact on the desire of students to recommend to others. One of them is if the prospective student asks about the information about the private college that will be entered, then the student will give positive information about the college. This will have a good impact on the intended college.

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