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An Empirical Study of Word of Mouth Strategies and Positive Recommendation Intentions in Private High Schools

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Abstract: Education is very necessary for the community to avoid ignorance, therefore competition also exists at the high school level, especially for private schools where one competes with another to get prospective students who will later become the best graduates. This study aims to analyze and test the influence of e-service quality variables, positive WOM, customer trust. The entire object that is the main focus is private high school students in Tangerang City. Sampling uses a purposive sampling method based on certain criteria such as distributing questionnaires with several related statements about things based on existing indicator variables and using a quantitative method with a causal approach between the independent variables and the dependent variables used in the study, which is calculated using the Slovin formula because the number of populations is known so that the existing sample after being calculated is 390. And this study uses the Smart PLS ver 4.0.9.6 analysis method. The results of the existing hypothesis test, it shows that the E-Service Quality and Customer Trust variables have significant positive results on the Positive Word of Mouth variable. The existing findings indicate that if the school provides good service, it will gain consumer trust which will later lead to positive reviews from consumers to others.

Keywords: Education, E-service Quality, Positive Word of Mouth, Customer Trust, Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Education is used as a means of improving the welfare of a country. Education is a key aspect that is important in the process of learning and knowledge development. Today, education is a basic need for every individual in society. Even now the government also advises and requires everyone to obtain the right to education for 12 years and is allowed for more than

12 years. Education also acts as a medium for individuals to avoid ignorance and increase insight. Therefore, the higher the knowledge education obtained, the higher the one will get. Education is an effort made to develop the personality and abilities of a student both inside and outside the school (Scott, 2021).

High school is a formal level of education that provides general education at the secondary level, continuing from junior high school. The learning process in high school is a conscious activity to gather knowledge as well as develop social skills, leadership, and teamwork. In this level, students are prepared to be able to face complex and dynamic challenges, therefore high schools provide adequate facilities and services according to the needs of students. Secondary education is intended to deepen and expand knowledge that is expanded in elementary and junior high schools, in addition to preparing students to become citizens who have social, cultural, and natural relationships around them as well as to develop further abilities in the world of work or continue to university.

In Tangerang City, there are several high schools at the private level which is based on the results of the researcher's observations that have been carried out directly, in which the researcher found that there are several private schools, especially non-Muslim private schools, which are quite much in demand by minorities because they are based on services, experiences and others. If observed further, the entrance fee itself is very expensive, but why is it a private school that is in great demand. One example is the Catholic Private High School (SMA Strada Thomas Aquino) in Tangerang City which is the most popular non-Muslim school because based on the experience of researchers, the school provides very good facilities and services which is also related to the research conducted by the author regarding e-service quality on positive word of mouth And finally it can create a sense of customer trust so that people who have felt the quality of their service will recommend others to enroll someone in the school and a sense of customer trust emerges that makes the positive word of mouth develop.

In this finding, the author will discuss the positive influence of online service quality (E-Service Quality) and consumer trust (Customer Trust) which can affect Word of Mouth in the field of high school education in the Tangerang City area. Based on data from 13 regions in the city of Tangerang, with a total number of high schools that exist is 88 schools. For now, if you want to register for a high school school, use zoning considerations where the school also looks at the distance traveled by students to accept the student at their school. When viewed from the table data in the number of schools by sub-district in Tangerang City for high schools as many as 473 in 2018, 482 in 2019, and 484 in 2020 (Naufal et al., 2021) (BPS Tangerang City, 2021) .

In the city of Tangerang itself, there are several private schools with a variety of prices from entrance fees, tuition fees and other payments, and there are also different service quality according to the standards of each school. There are several recommendations for the best private schools in Tangerang, namely, SMA BPK Penabur Gading Serpong has a total UTBK score of 613,312, SMA UPH Collage with a total score of UTBK 584,074, SMA Strada Thomas Aquino with an average score of UTBK 552,610, SMA Budi Luhur with a UTBK score of 529,308, SMA Al Wildan Islamic School with a UTBK score of 528,414, SMA Islamic Village with a UTBK score of 516,726 and SMA Yuppentek 1 with a UTBK score of 513,861. The data recommended for these schools is data for 2022, besides that the schools have their own advantages with the quality given to their students (Zulfikar, 2022).

Of the many schools in Tangerang City, they must be able to compete by improving the quality of services they provide to students who study there. Quality service (e-service quality) can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the services expected and experienced by consumers, and how it contributes to improving service quality (Zeithaml, 2013). E-Service Quality has a significant effect on customer satisfaction and will indirectly cause a positive

wom to the service quality provided, which will later cause good things for high schools in Tangerang City.

Consumer satisfaction is increased through product performance that is perceived to meet buyers' expectations. If it has met expectations, customers will be satisfied. If it exceeds expectations, then customers get high satisfaction or are very happy. These marketing activities are key for marketers in schools and create word of mouth (WOM). So that it can increase recommendations from parents of students who are already at the school to parents of students who are looking for school recommendations. This activity will also build the trust of parents of students who have implanted their children in the high school.

Word Of Mouth is a form of marketing that will create trust for customers so that later children will also generate loyalty from them to us. Because indirectly customers are reviewing what they are or have tried for a good / service. For example, at the school level, they will get recommendations based on the results of someone's experience so that they can also feel the facilities that they have tried at the school. Therefore, every school that exists, especially in the Tangerang area, must be able to provide facilities or equipment to its students properly, and must provide good service to cause a sense of love for the actions given by the school.

After the school provides all the infrastructure facilities properly, it will also cause a sense of trust or customer trust. So that a positive word of mouth (WoM) appears both to the parents of the students or even the students themselves which will cause the positive WoM. This can also increase the addition of students if it can run well so that schools can increase their accreditation so that they are better known by people out there. This Customer Trust arises because of the trust of the student's parents or students in all regulations or facilities provided by the school. So that they can become loyal customers such as recommending their younger siblings to the school.

According to research, (Widayati *et al*., 2020) effective image and price image have an influence on word-of-mouth promotion (positive WoM) in residents and tourists who visit Yogyakarta, so it can be understood that this positive word of mouth has an impact on a purchase of products / services. In addition, according to research, electronic word-of-mouth promotion can also affect a tourist attraction for a person to visit the place because of several reviews on social media and this makes the place more known, which means that with frequent tourists visiting, there will be word-of-mouth promotion (Positive WoM) through social media. (Permana, 2020)

Based on previous research that raised the topic of research on private university education in Jakarta, which of several private universities in Jakarta experienced challenges in attracting prospective new students. So that finally many use (Riorini *et al*., 2018) positive WOM as a promotional tool for advertising and from this positive WOM will cause customer satisfaction and service quality so that many private university campuses in Jakarta improve their facility services. In the study, it was explained that high e-service quality will affect customer behavior to recommend positively about the company to others (positive WoM).

Based on previous explanations and research, the phenomenon that exists based on the Y variable (Positive Word of Mouth) is what makes Private High Schools in Tangerang City in Tangerang City in great interest by some people for various reasons, even not infrequently some existing private schools have negative reviews. In addition, for the phenomenon that exists based on the X variable (Service Quality & Customer Trust), there are several private high schools in Tangerang City that do not have good standards in providing services and it is also not uncommon for some students and parents to be dissatisfied so they do not trust the school. So it can be concluded that the phenomenon that occurs is that each private high school in Tangerang City provides different services so that it has an impact on the level of student satisfaction and trust, Positive Word Of Mouth can be an effective marketing strategy to introduce schools to prospective new students here the author wants to know the extent to

which E-Service Quality and Customer Trust play a role in encouraging Positive Word of mouth.

In the study, it was concluded that (Wirawan, 2022) word of mouth is formed due to the results of service and product performance, so that it can produce organic word of mouth. WoM itself is a process of interpersonal communication that occurs in the social environment, where individuals talk about the performance of the product purchased. In the WOM process, the brand does not involve the brand in managing the message, it all takes place in the social environment of the consumer where information about the product, service, and other attributes about the brand is exchanged at the level of interpersonal communication.

Based on the sample and population obtained in the study, there were two informants who received information or exposure to WOM from the community, not from their families. They heard information from many people about (Wirawan and Oct. 2022) the STIKS Tarakanita brand, both positive and negatively perceived. There is a positive word of mouth because consumers like or even love the brand and the product or service they receive, there is a desire to help someone. This is what the informants felt when thinking and considering the option to continue their studies to college.

Theoritical Review

Marketing Management

Marketing, according to Renaldo *et al*., (2023), is the process by which businesses interact with customers and build relationships to get value from them in return. The goal of marketing is to attract new customers by promising value and retaining old customers by providing value and satisfaction. According to Sumakul *et al*., (2023) said marketing is about identifying and meeting human and social needs.

Consumer Behavior

According to the book (Kotler, Keller, and Chernev 2022) , consumer behavior in the digital age is increasingly complex due to the influence of social media and technology, which allows easy access to product information. As a result, consumers' preferences and purchasing decisions are influenced by these influences. In addition, according to Solomon (2020), consumer behavior is not limited to the act of purchase, it also includes social, emotional, psychological, and psychological components that affect a person's decision-making process. According to Fachrurazi *et al*., (2023) consumer behavior is an action taken by actors related to the decision-making process in obtaining, using, and disposing of the products consumed.

Positive WOM (Word of Mouth)

Word Of Mouth itself is a positive promotional tool that brings benefits to the company (Sanayei and Jokar, 2013). It was explained in previous research that the positive WoM method was nine times more effective as a promotional tool for corporate advertising than traditional advertising. WoM is a story or information about a product, brand or service from consumers who want to convey experiences and communication and share recommendations with other consumers. According to (Fadhilah and Saputra, 2021) word of mouth is the activity of informing a product to other consumers about recommendations.

E-Service Quality

Electronic Service Quality or also called e-ServQual is a new version of Service Quality (ServQual). E-ServQual was developed to evaluate the services provided on the Internet. The use of technology in providing services to consumers can create value in the services provided by the company, namely with the ease of communication between consumers and producers and the efficiency of delivering products and services to consumers (Oliveria *et al*., 2002; Liljandera *et al*., 2006).

Customer Trust

When consumers feel comfortable interacting online, consumers tend to develop trust and show vulnerability. Because the services provided by the company are in accordance with the wishes of the consumer, the consumer becomes loyal and trusts the company to continue to use the services or products provided by the company. The study explains that one of the main reasons why trust is an important consideration for consumers when buying goods is because consumers often face the uncertainty and complexity of their situation (Jayaputra *et al*., 2022); (Jayaputra et al., 2022).

Hypothesis

Based on the explanation of the theory, several hypotheses were found as follows:

1. The Positive Influence of E-Service Quality on Customer Trust.
   According to (Jayaputra *et al*., 2022) by providing good service quality to consumers, consumers will feel satisfied so as to generate consumer trust. Based on this, it is concluded that the existence of good service quality will provide satisfaction for consumers which can generate consumer trust in the products/services that have been carried out. So a hypothesis is proposed as strong:
   H1: There is an influence of E-Service Quality on Customer Trust.
2. The Influence of Customer Trust on Positive Word of Mouth
   According to (Jayaputra *et al*., 2022), it is stated that e-trust affects a person's purchase decision and trust is also a direct influence for consumers before deciding something. From these results, it is concluded that if there is trust from consumers, it can lead to positive recommendations with praise for the service/goods. So the following hypothesis is proposed:
   H2: There is an influence of Customer Trust on the Positive Word of Mouth.
3. The Effect of E-Service Quality on the Positive Word of Mouth.
   According to (Fadhilah and Saputra, 2021) word of mouth is a consumer activity to inform other consumers about the reorganization of products/services. Based on this, it can be concluded that WoM actors will do ways to share their experiences, whether they are positive or negative. So the following hypothesis is proposed:
   H3: There is an influence of E-Service Quality on the Positive Word of Mouth.
4. The Effect of E-Servie Quality on Positive Word of Mouth through Customer Trust.
   According to Carlson and O'Cass, 2010; Sanayei and Jokar, 2013) E-Service Quality is designed to evaluate the services offered through the internet, with positive results from existing services that can generate customer trust thereby reducing risks and affecting repurchases. Based on this, it is concluded that with good e-service quality, it can cause a positive Word of Mouth and consumers have a sense of trust (customer trust) in the products or services used. So the following hypothesis is proposed:
   H4: There is E-Service Quality for Word of Mouth Positive through Customer Trust.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a quantitative method with a descriptive-verifiable approach. Primary data were obtained through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents who had been determined by purposive sampling technique, while secondary data were collected from literature, journals, and related documents. The research instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure the quality of the data obtained. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tests to describe the characteristics of respondents and inferential tests through multiple linear regression to test the hypotheses proposed in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Measurement (outer) Model

Convergent Validity Test Results**.** The Convergent Validity test of the measurement model with reflective indicators is assessed based on the correlation between the item score or component score and the construct score calculated by PLS. Individual indicators are considered valid if they have a correlation value above 0.70. By looking at the output results of the correlation between the indicators and their constructs as seen in the table and structural figure below:

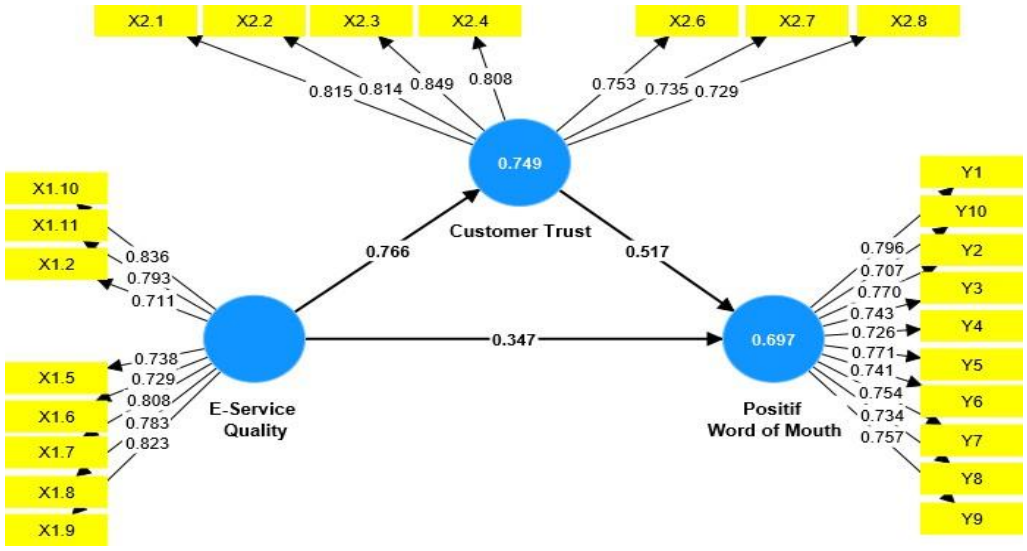


Figure 1. PLS Algorithm Results (modified)
Source: PLS Output (2025)

The results of the modification of the convergent validity test in Figure 4.2 and Table 4.8, it can be seen that all indicators have met convergent validity because they have a loading factor value above 0.70.

Discriminant Validity Test Results

Discriminant validity *testing*, namely reflective indicators, can be seen in *cross loading* between indicators and their constructs. An indicator can be declared valid if it has the highest *loading factor* to the intended construct compared to the *loading factor* to other constructs. This shows that the correlation of *the E-Service Quality* construct with its indicators (X1.10 is 0.836, X1.11 is 0.793, X1.2 is 0.711, X1.5 is 0.738, X1.6, is 0.729, X1.7 is 0.808, X1.8 is 0.783, and X1.9 of 0.823,) higher than the correlation of *the E-Service Quality* indicator with other constructs, then the correlation of *the Customer Trust* construct with the indicator (X2.1 of 0.815, X2.2 of 0.814, X2.3 of 0.849, X2.4 of 0.808, X2.6 of 0.753, X2.7 of 0.735 and X2.8 of 0.729) this proves that the indicator is higher than the correlation of *the Customer Trust* indicator with other constructs, then the correlation *of the Word of Mouth Positive* construct with the indicator (Y1 is 0.796, Y10 is 0.796, Y10 is 0.707, Y2 0.770, Y3 0.743, Y4 0.726, Y5 0.771, Y6 0.741, Y7 0.754, Y8 0.734, and Y9 0.757) this means that the indicator is higher than the correlation of *the Word of Positive indicator Mouth* with other constructs.

Another method to see *discriminant validity* is to look at the *square root value of average variance extracted* (AVE) of each construct with the correlation between the construct and other constructs in the model, then it can be said to have *a good discriminant validity* value.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test Results

Variable	AVE
Customer Trust	0,620
E-Service Quality	0,607
Positive Word of Mouth	0,563

Source: PLS Output, 2025

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell Lacker Criterium)

	Customer Trust	E-Service Quality	Positive Word of Mouth
Customer Trust	**0,787**		
E-Service Quality	0,766	**0,779**	
Positive Word of Mouth	0,723	0,747	**0,750**

Source: PLS Output, 2025

From Tables 1 and 2 it can be concluded that the square root of the *average variance extracted* ($\sqrt{AVE}$)for each construct is greater than the correlation between one construct and another construct in the model. Based on the AVE value based on the table above, it can be concluded that the construct in the estimated model meets the *discriminant validity criteria*.

Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Test Results

Composite *reliability* testing and *Cronbach's alpha* aim to test the reliability of instruments in a research model. If all latent variables have a *composite reliability* value or *Cronbach's alpha* ≥ 0.7, it means that the construct has good reliability or the questionnaire used as a tool in this study is reliable or consistent.

Table 3. Composite Reliability & Cronbach's Alpha Test Results

Variable	Cronbach Alpha's	Composite Reliability	Remarks
Customer Trust	0,897	0,919	Reliable
E-Service Quality	0,907	0,925	Reliable
Positive Word of Mouth	0,914	0,928	Reliable

Source: PLS Output, 2025

Based on Table 3, the results of the *composite reliability* and *Cronbach's alpha* tests showed satisfactory values, because all latent variables had *a composite reliability* value and *Cronbach's alpha* ≥ 0.70. This means that all latent variables are said to be reliable.

Structural Model Testing or Hypothesis Test (Inner Model)

R-square Value Test Results

Look at the R-square value which is the *goodness-fit test of the model*.

Table 4. R-Square Value of Endogenous Variables

Endogenous Variable	R-square
Customer Trust	**0,749**
Positive Word of Mouth	0,697

Source: PLS Output, 2025

The structural model indicates that the model on *the Customer Trust* and *Positive Word of Mouth variables* can be said to be strong because it has a value above 0.67. The model of the influence of independent latent variables (*E-Service Quality*) on *Customer Trust* gives an R-square value of 0.749 which can be interpreted as the variability of *the Customer Trust* construct that can be explained by the variability of *the E-Service Quality* construct is 74.9% while 25.1% is explained by other variables outside the studied. *Positive Word of Mouth* has an R-Square value of 0.697, so it can be interpreted that the variability of the *Wordof Mouth Positive* construct can be explained by the variability of *the E-Service Quality construct,* and *Customer Trust* is 69.7% while 30.3% is explained by other variables outside the research.

Goodness of Fit Model Test Results

Goodness of Fit Testing The structural model on the *inner model* uses *a predictive-relevance* value (Q^2). A Q-square value greater than 0 (zero) indicates that the model has *a predictive relevance* value. The R-square value of each endogenous variable in this study can be seen in the following calculation:

The *predictive relevance value* is obtained by the formula:

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R1)(1 - R_p)$$
$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0{,}749)(1 - 0{,}697)$$
$$Q^2 = 1 - (0{,}251)(0{,}303)$$
$$Q^2 = 0{,}9239$$

The results of the calculation above show a *predictive-relevance* value of 0 (zero). This means that 92.39% of 0,9239*Customer Trust* and *Word of Mouth Positives* (dependent variables) are explained by the independent variables used. The model is said to be feasible to have relevant predictive values.

Hypothesis Test Results (Path Coefficient Estimation)

The estimated value for the path relationships in the structural model must be significant. The significance value of this hypothesis can be obtained by *the boostrapping procedure*. Seeing the significance of the hypothesis by looking at the value of the parameter coefficient and the value of the significance of the T-statistic in the *boostrapping report algorithm*. To find out the significance or insignificance of the T-table is seen from the T-table at alpha 0.05 (5%) = 1.96, then the T-table is compared to the T-count (T-statistic).

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P Values	Remarks
Positive Word of Mouth Customer Trust →	0,517	0,073	7,038	0,000	Positive - Significant
E-Service Quality → *Customer Trust*	0,766	0,089	8,597	0,000	Positive - Significant
E-Service Quality → *Positive Word of Mouth*	0,347	0,066	5,253	0,000	Positive - Significant
Mediation					
Positive Word → *of Mouth* →*Customer Trust Service*	0,447	0,057	7,841	0,000	Partial Mediation

Source: PLS Output, 2025

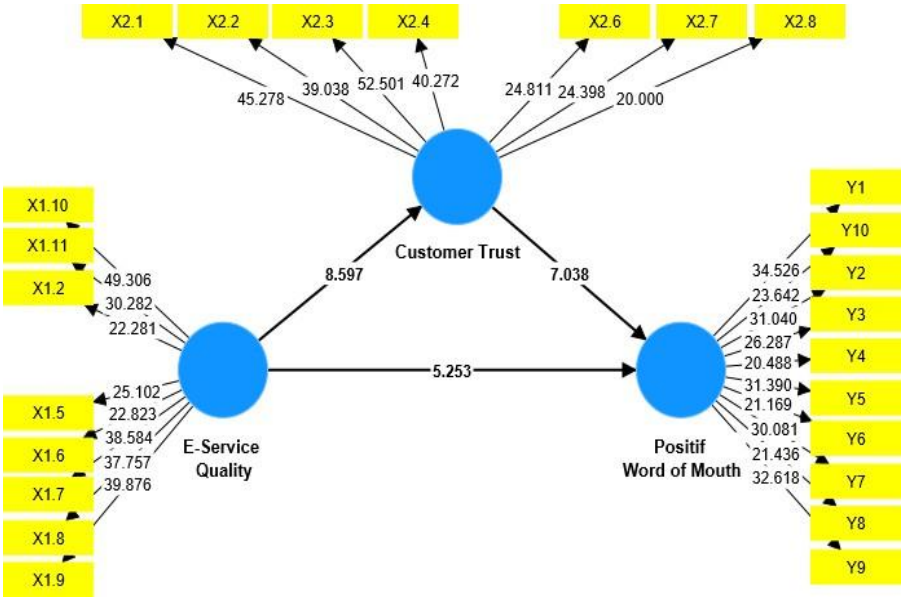


Figure 2. Boostrapping Test Results
Source: PLS Output, 2025

Discussion

E-Service Quality to Customer Trust

Based on *the hypothesis* test in this study, the results of *the T-statistic value* were obtained of 8.597, *the original sample* value of 0.766, and the *P value* of 0.000. The *T-statistic* value is greater than the *T-table* value of 1.96, *the original sample* value shows a Positive value, and the *P value* shows a value less than 0.05, this result shows that *E-Service Quality* has a significant positive effect on *Customer Trust*. This is because the school website provides an effective search feature and makes it easier for me to get information, as well as information available in the school's online system is always updated and according to my needs as a student. This makes the students confident that the quality of this school can be relied on and the policies and procedures that apply in the school are explained openly and easily understood. With adequate services such as in the website or other services at school, students will also feel more confident in the school because they can facilitate well. The results of this study are supported by research that states that Isalman *et al*., (2025) *E-Service Quality* has a significant positive effect on *Customer Trust.*

The Influence of Customer Trust on the Positive Word of Mouth

Based on the hypothesis test in this study, the results of *the T-statistical* value of 7.038, the *original* sample value of 0.517, and the *P value* of 0.000 The *T-statistical* value is greater than the *T-table value* of 1.96, the *original sample* value shows a Positive value, and the *P values* shows a value of less than 0.05, this result shows that *Customer Trust* has a significant positive effect on *the Word of Mouth Positive*. This is because the students feel that the school shows a high commitment to providing the best service to its students and is confident that their current school has a good and trusted reputation, so the students often recommend their school when someone asks about a good school and feels satisfied to be a student in this school. With high trust from a student, the school will get positive reviews about the existing services and it can be shared with others. The results of this study support research that shows that Kharisma *et al*., (2020) *Customer Trust* has a significant positive effect on the *Positive Word of Mouth.*

The Effect of E-Service Quality on the Positive Word of Mouth

Based on the hypothesis test in this study, the results of *the T-statistical* value were 5.253, the *original sample* value was 0.347, and the *P value* was 0.000. The *T-statistic* value is greater than the *T-table* value of 1.96, the *value of the original sample* shows a Positive value, and the value of *P Values* shows a value of less than 0.05, this result shows that *E-Service Quality* has a significant positive effect on *the Positive Word of Mouth*. This is because if you submit questions or complaints through the online system, you are always quick to respond and students feel helped because online school services respond quickly, so students believe that recommendations from friends or family about this school are very trustworthy. By responding quickly to every complaint submitted by students, this becomes one of the good services provided to students, therefore they can give *a positive word of mouth* to the school to others. The results of this study are in line with research that states that Suherli *et al*., (2019) *E-Service Quality* has a significant positive effect on *the Positive Word of Mouth.*

The Effect of E-Service Quality on the Positive Word of Mouth through Customer Trust

Based on the hypothesis test in this study, the results of *the T-statistical* value of 7.841, the *original sample* value of 0.447, and the *P value* of 0.000 were obtained. The *T-statistical* value is greater than the *T-table* value of 1.96, *the original sample* value shows a Positive value, and the *P value* shows a value less than 0.05, this result shows that *Customer Trust* is able to partially mediate the influence of *E-Service Quality* on *the Positive Word of Mouth*. This is because schools always provide clear and open information related to products or services, driven by consumer belief that the quality of the school is reliable, which makes them often share fun experiences at this school with others. With clear information about various things in the school, this can cause trust from students so that it becomes a positive thing for the school and students as well as will get positive reviews from students for the school which later this can be heard by others and will choose the school.

CONCLUSION

This study tries to analyze variables related to e-service quality, customer trust, and word of mouth positivity. The results of this study were obtained from a study on Tangerang City High School Students. From the results of the calculations in this study, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) E-Service Quality has a significant positive effect on Customer Trust in Tangerang City Private High School Students. This means that if E-Service Quality is in high school, consumer trust will increase. (2) Customer Trust has a significant positive effect on the Positive Word of Mouth in Tangerang City Private High School Students. This means that if the trust of students is high, then the Word of Mouth Positivity towards the school will increase. (3) E-Service Quality has a significant positive effect on the Positive Word of Mouth in Private High School Students in Tangerang City. This means that if the school creates good e-service quality, the Word of Mouth Positive will increase (4) Customer Trust was able to partially mediate the influence of E-Service Quality on Positive Word of Mouth in Tangerang City Private High School Students. This means that by providing good service at school, it will build consumer trust so that consumers can share their positive experiences with others. So it can be concluded that E-Service Quality and Customer Trust have an equally important role to be able to increase the Positive Word of Mouth from high school students at school which can later be useful for school marketing strategies.

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