

THE ROLE OF SERVICE QUALITY, BRAND IMAGE, AND WORD OF MOUTH ON COLLEGE DECISIONS WITH CONSUMER SATISFACTION AS INTERVENING VARIABLES (STUDY ON RPL PROGRAM AT IIB DARMAJAYA)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of service quality, brand image, and word of mouth on the decision to continue studying, with consumer satisfaction as an intervening variable in the context of the Past Learning Recognition Program (RPL) at the Darmajaya Institute of Informatics and Business (IIB Darmajaya). Data were collected from students of the RPL IIB Darmajaya Program using the purposive sampling, with a total of 100 respondents. The analysis was performed using multiple regression with the help of SPSS software. The results of the study show that service quality, brand image, and word of mouth have a significant effect on consumer satisfaction, but only word of mouth has a significant influence on college decisions. Consumer satisfaction is proven to be a significant intervening variable in strengthening the influence of independent variables on college decisions. This research emphasizes the importance of word of mouth strategy and consumer satisfaction in improving the decision of prospective students to continue their education. Higher education institutions such as IIB Darmajaya can capitalize on these findings by improving service quality and building a positive brand image, while encouraging effective interpersonal communication among students and alumni.

Keywords: Service Quality, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, Consumer Satisfaction, College Decision, RPL.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the increasingly advanced era of globalization requires educational institutions to be sensitive to the changing times in order to meet the needs and desires of consumers as service users. Marketing of educational services focuses on efforts to maximize the quality of services provided. This service involves the output of the service provider's direct activities to consumers. Therefore, the role of employees is very crucial in determining the success of educational institutions in delivering their services.

Educational service marketing involves the perception of students, parents, employees, and the public towards educational institutions as institutions that serve the needs of educational service customers (Wijaya et al., 2022). One of the institutions that is committed to providing quality educational services is the Darmajaya Institute of Informatics and Business (IIB Darmajaya). Efforts include infrastructure development, curriculum updates, information technology utilization, and cooperation with various parties. With affordable education costs, IIB Darmajaya is able to attract various groups of people and is committed to providing the best quality education.

Higher education plays an important role in producing a competent generation, opening

up career opportunities, and fostering a critical mindset. One of the government's strategic initiatives to support lifelong learning is the Recognition of Past Learning (RPL) program. The program recognizes individual learning experiences gained outside of formal education, such as work experience, training, or professional certification. The main goal of RPL is to increase access to higher education for people who have limited time or access to formal education.

Good product quality has a positive impact on consumer satisfaction, which ultimately increases public interest in continuing education at IIB Darmajaya. Consumer satisfaction is influenced by the performance of lecturers and employees. If the performance does not meet expectations, the decision to continue education may be affected. Factors such as service quality, brand image, and word of mouth communication affect consumer satisfaction and contribute to purchasing decisions (Setiawan et al., 2019; Wijaya et al., 2022).

Service quality reflects customer expectations based on past experiences, promotions, and advertisements, which are compared to actual experiences (Keller & Kotler, 2022). Services that meet consumer needs will increase satisfaction, which then influences purchase decisions. A positive brand image gives confidence to consumers in choosing an institution (Wijaya, 2022). Meanwhile, word of mouth is considered more trustworthy than advertising, because it comes from relevant personal recommendations (Chen & Yuan, 2020; Sweeney et al., 2020).

Previous research has shown mixed results related to the relationship between service quality, brand image, word of mouth, and consumer satisfaction with purchase decisions. Fanani et al. (2021) found that service quality has a significant effect on purchasing decisions through consumer satisfaction as an intervening variable. However, other studies (Setiawan et al., 2019; Amarin & Wijaksana, 2021) shows that consumer satisfaction does not always have a significant effect as an intervening variable.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Consumer Behavior

Consumer Behavior Theory is a study that focuses on how individuals, groups, or organizations choose, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to meet their needs and desires. The theory includes a variety of concepts and models that explain internal factors such as motivation, perception, attitudes, learning, and personality, as well as external factors such as culture, social class, reference groups, and family influence. In addition, consumer behavior theory also describes the consumer decision-making process consisting of problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Keller & Kotler, 2022; Rachmad, 2024; Tontini et al., 2021).

2.2 Consumer Decision

Consumer decisions in purchasing goods or services are stages in making decisions where consumers actually buy (Mayasari et al., 2024). Luhglatno et al. (2024) said that the purchase decision is a conscious and deliberate action by consumers in choosing a product choice based on their own desires. According to Fanani et al. (2021) and Kurniawan et al. (2022), a purchase decision is an individual's thinking evaluating various product choices from many choices. According to Ashfaq (2019); Jain et al. (2019); Kumar et al. (2019); Roy et al. (2021); Wijaya et al. (2022); Wirtz & Lovelock (2022) has several dimensions to

Measure Service Purchase Decisions: 1. Service quality, 2. Perceived value, 3. Customer satisfaction, 4. Customer loyalty, 5. Post-purchase behavior

2.3 Quality of Service

Service quality is the expected level of excellence and the control of this level of excellence to meet customer wishes (Syahsudarmi, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2022). Good service quality is considered to be able to meet consumer expectations or expectations so that it will provide consumer satisfaction. Service quality must start with customer needs and end with customer perception, customer perception itself is a comprehensive assessment of the excellence of a service (Andri et al., 2022).

2.4 Brand Image

According to Mogaji (2021), it is revealed that brand image is a set of associations that are organized into something meaningful. Brand image is considered an association that appears in the minds of consumers towards a brand. The association itself is conceptualized based on type, support, strength, and uniqueness (Plumeyer et al., 2019; Wijaya et al., 2022). The image of the brand will form a belief and preference for the brand, consumers who have a positive image will be more likely to buy the brand (Parris & Guzman, 2023). Keller & Kotler (2022) also argues that brand image is a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of an object.

2.5 Word of Mouth

According to Chen & Yuan (2020), word of mouth is interpersonal communication carried out by each individual with a product, a good, a good, or a service. The purpose of this communication is for other customers as well as information provided in the form of attributes of various products and services as well as about users or manufacturers. There are two properties of WOM according to Goodman (2019) that is *negative* WOM and *positive* WOM. *Positive word of mouth* is a marketing activity carried out by a brand so that consumers discuss, promote, and sell the brand. Better consumer satisfaction will result in *positive word of mouth* (Sweeney et al., 2020). While *negative* WOM can threaten a company, because if consumers are not satisfied, they will disseminate negative information related to the product to potential buyers.

2.6 Consumer Satisfaction

According to Oktavanny & Sulistiadi (2022), consumer satisfaction is the overall attitude that is indicated towards goods or services after they acquire or use them. Meanwhile, Irawan et al. (2023) revealed that consumer satisfaction is a cognitive situation of buyers with regard to the equivalence or dissymmetry between sacrifice and the results obtained. Irawan et al. (2023) also defines three main components of consumer satisfaction, including: 1. Emotional and cognitive, 2. Expectations, products, and experiences, and 3. After consumption, after product/service selection, and based on experience

2.7 Methodology

The type of research used is Explanatory Research, which is research aimed at finding out or explaining the position of the variables being studied and the relationship between one variable and another.

2.8 Sample Population and Sampling Techniques

The population in this study is all students of the RPL IIB Darmajaya Program with a total population of 321 students. Because this is a large target group that researchers hope to generalize. With details of S1 Odd Period 2023 as many as 119 students and S1 Even Period 2023 as many as 11 students. And for S2 Odd Period 2023 as many as 52 students and S2 Even Period 2023 as many as 59 students.

2.9 Sampling Techniques

The sample is part of the number and characteristics that the population has. Sampling of this study uses Non Probability Sampling, namely Purposive Sampling. In the research, the technique of taking the number of sample members is carried out using the proportional sampling method, namely with the following formula:

$$ni = \frac{Ni}{N} \cdot n$$

Information:

ni = Number of sample members by stratum

n = Total number of sample members

Ni = Number of sample members by stratum

N = Number of members of the total sample

Thus, the sample in this study is:

Table 1. Respondent Distribution

No	Level of Education	Criterion	Sample
1	S1	$210 / 321 \times 100 = 65,42$	65
2	S2	$111 / 321 \times 100 = 34,57$	35
Sum			100

Source : Data processed in 2024

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on education level in the research on students of the Past Learning Recognition Program (RPL) at IIB Darmajaya. From the total population of 321 students, samples were taken proportionally with details of 65 respondents (65.42%) from the S1 level and 35 respondents (34.57%) from the S2 level, resulting in a total sample of 100 people. This distribution is designed to reflect the composition of the population proportionally, so that the data collected can provide a representative picture related to service quality, brand image, word of mouth, consumer satisfaction, and student college decisions.

2.10 Validity Test

Febryaningrum (2024) revealed that validity indicates the level of ability of an instrument to reveal something that is the subject of measurement born with the instrument. The validity test aims to measure how far a measuring instrument is accurate to perform its function or provide appropriate measurement results. The

criteria for praising validity include: If the value of r calculates $> r$ of the table and the significance value < 0.05 , then the indicator is said to be valid. If the value of the r calculation $< r$ of the table and the significance value > 0.05 , then the indicator is said to be invalid.

2.11 Reliability Test

Reality tests are intended to find out how far the measurements are reliable and trusted. The reliability test conducted the entire test using the alpha coefficient proposed by Cronbach (Sarstedt et al., 2023). The reliability testing criteria put forward by Cronbach are as follows: If the Alpha Cronbach value of the calculation results > 0.6 , then it is said that the research variable is reliable. If the Alpha Cronbach value of the calculation results < 0.6 , it is said that the research variable is unreliable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1 Uji Test Regression Linier Berganda

This study uses five indicator variables, namely Service Quality (X1) and Brand Image (X2), Word of Mouth (X3), Consumer Satisfaction (Z), and College Decision (Y) to measure Farmer Satisfaction (Y). The test had two regression equations and was carried out using the SPSS 26.0 program. The following are the results of multiple regression analysis in the first equation:

$$\text{Regresi Berganda : } Y_1 = b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + e_1$$

Table 2 Results of Multiple Regression Correlation Test Equations1

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.836a	.699	.690	1.307

Source : Data processed in 2024

Table 2 above shows the result of the R Square value of 0.690. This value shows that the influence of service quality variables, brand image, word of mouth on consumer satisfaction is 69%. Meanwhile, 31% can be influenced by other factors outside the three independent variables. The following are the results of multiple regression analysis in the Second Equation equation:

$$\text{Regresi Berganda : } Y_2 = b_4X_1 + b_5X_2 + b_6X_3 + b_7Z_1 + e_1$$

Table 3 Results of Multiple Regression Correlation Test Equation 2

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.798a	.637	.622	1.660

Source : Data processed in 2024

Table 3 above explains the result of the R Square value of 0.637. This value shows that the influence of service quality variables, brand image, word of mouth on consumer satisfaction is 63.7%. Meanwhile, 36.3% can be influenced by other factors outside the three independent variables.

3.1.2 Intervening Analysis Testing

This study uses moderation variables (Prena, G. D., & Muliyan, I. G. I. (2020). namely the Seriousness of Agricultural Extension Workers, to assess how these variables can strengthen or weaken the impact of the variables of Agricultural Extension Performance and Agricultural Extension Competence on Farmer Satisfaction. Testing was carried out using SPSS 25.0. The following are the results of the moderation regression analysis carried out:

$$Y_2 = b_4X_1 + b_5X_2 + b_6X_3 + b_7Z_1 + e_1$$

Table 4 Regression Value of Consumer Satisfaction (Z) between Service Quality (X1), Brand Image (X2), Word of Mouth (X3) Towards College Satisfaction (Y)

Variable	t-count	Mr
Service Quality Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Consumer Satisfaction	3.868	0.000
Brand Image Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Consumer Satisfaction	2.519	0.013
Word of Mouth Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Consumer Satisfaction	5.014	0.000
Service Quality Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions	0.929	0.355
Brand Image Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions	0.374	0.709
Word of Mouth Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions	3.000	0.003
Consumer Satisfaction Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions	3.871	0.000
Dependent Variable: College Decision		

Source : Data Processing 2024

Table 4 shows the results of the regression calculation of the value of the service quality regression coefficient of 0.327 and shows a positive (unidirectional) influence. This means that the higher the quality of service, the higher the customer satisfaction. The value of the brand image regression coefficient is 0.201 and shows a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the brand image, the higher the consumer satisfaction. The value of the word of mouth regression coefficient is 0.413 and shows a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the quality of service, the higher the customer satisfaction. The value of the service quality regression coefficient is 0.093 and shows a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the quality of service, the better the decision to study. The value

of the brand image regression coefficient is 0.034 and shows a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the brand image, the higher the decision to study. The value of the word of mouth regression coefficient was 0.306 and showed a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the quality of service, the better the decision to study. The value of the regression coefficient of consumer satisfaction was 0.436 and showed a positive influence (unidirectional). This means that the higher the quality of service, the better the decision to study.

3.1.3 T-Test Results

The t-test (Partial Test) is used to show how far an individual explanatory/independent variable affects the variation of the dependent variable. This test is carried out by:

$$t = \frac{\sqrt{n-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}}$$

Table 5 Results of Calculation of Service Quality Coefficient, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, Service Satisfaction on College Decisions

Variable	Calculation	ttable	Condition	Information
Quality of Service	0.099	1.661	$t_{hitung} < t_{table}$	Ho Accepted
Brand Image	0.034	1.661	$t_{hitung} < t_{table}$	Ho Accepted
Word Of Mouth	3.000	1.661	$t_{hitung} > t_{table}$	Ha Accepted
Consumer Satisfaction	3.871	1.661	$t_{hitung} > t_{table}$	Ha Accepted

Source : Data Processing 2024

1. Service Quality Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions.

Table 5 explains that t counts 0.929 with a table t value of 1.661 and a significance value of $0.355 > 0.05$. This shows that service quality has a positive and insignificant influence on college decisions, so this study does not support the fourth hypothesis. So, in this study, hypothesis 4 was rejected which means there was no influence between service quality and school decisions.

2. Brand Image Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions.

Based on Table 4, it shows that t counts 0.374 with a t-value of 1.661 and a significance value of $0.709 > 0.05$. This shows that brand image has a positive and insignificant influence on college decisions, so this study does not support the fifth hypothesis. So, in this study, hypothesis 5 was rejected which means that there is no influence between brand image and school decisions.

3. Word of Mouth Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions.

Based on Table 4, it shows that t counts 3,000 with a t-value of 1,661 table and a significance value of $0.003 < 0.05$. This shows that word of mouth has a positive

and significant influence on college decisions, so this study supports the sixth hypothesis. So, in this study, hypothesis 6 was accepted which means that there is an influence between word of mouth on school decisions.

4. Consumer Satisfaction Has a Positive and Significant Effect on College Decisions.

Based on Table 4, it shows that t counts 3.871 with a table t value of 1.661 and a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. This shows that consumer satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on college decisions, so this study supports the seventh hypothesis. So, in this study, hypothesis 7 was accepted which means that there is an influence between consumer satisfaction and school decisions.

3.1.4 Discussion

3.1.4.1 The Effect of Service Quality on Consumer Satisfaction.

The results of the analysis show that service quality has a positive and significant influence on consumer satisfaction. This is proven through statistical tests that show a significance value below 0.05, which means that good service quality directly increases consumer satisfaction. In the context of IIB Darmajaya, the quality of service which includes the speed of academic service, the friendliness of the staff, and the completeness of the facilities have made a great contribution to consumer satisfaction. This is in line with the results of research by Fanani et al. (2021), which found that high-quality service significantly improves customer satisfaction. Consumers tend to feel satisfied when the service they receive meets or even exceeds their expectations.

3.1.4.2 The Influence of Brand Image on Consumer Satisfaction.

Brand image has a positive and significant influence on consumer satisfaction based on the results of statistical analysis. Consumers tend to feel satisfied when they have a positive perception of a brand's image. IIB Darmajaya has succeeded in building a positive brand image through various marketing strategies and improving academic quality. Good reputation, innovation in educational programs, and academic achievement are factors that strengthen the institution's brand image. This is in line with Mogaji research (2021), which states that a strong brand image creates a positive emotional connection between consumers and institutions.

3.1.4.3 The Influence of Word of Mouth on Consumer Satisfaction

Word of mouth (WOM) has been proven to have a positive and significant influence on consumer satisfaction. Interpersonal communication carried out by consumers through personal recommendations is considered more reliable than advertising. In the context of IIB Darmajaya, WOM plays an important role in attracting prospective students. Alumni and students who are satisfied with the service and quality of education give positive testimonials to friends and family. Research by Sweeney et al. (2020) also shows that positive WOM contributes to

customer loyalty and satisfaction. However, Henim & Sari (2020) added that WOM is more effective at attracting new consumers than retaining existing customers

3.1.4.4 The Effect of Service Quality on Lecture Decisions

Service quality has a positive but not significant influence on college decisions based on the results of this study. Although prompt and appropriate academic service and friendly and professional staff are valued by consumers, the results of the analysis show that the influence of service quality on college decisions does not reach a significant level. Keller & Kotler (2022) states that purchasing decisions, including the decision to choose an educational institution, can be influenced by a variety of factors, and the quality of service is one of them. However, in this context, the decision of prospective students to choose IIB Darmajaya seems to be more influenced by other variables such as recommendations or personal experience.

3.1.4.4 The Influence of Brand Image on College Decisions

Brand image has a positive but not significant influence on college decisions. These findings support the research of Plumeyer et al. (2019), which stated that the influence of brand image depends on other factors such as consumer perception of service quality and education costs. In the context of IIB Darmajaya, although the brand image has been well formed, the decision of prospective students to register is more influenced by other factors such as recommendations and personal experience. Therefore, there is a need for a strategy that is more focused on improving the consumer experience to strengthen the influence of brand image on college decisions.

3.1.4.4 The Influence of Word of Mouth on College Decisions

The results of the study show that word of mouth has a significant influence on college decisions. This research supports the findings of Gildin (2022), which states that a positive WOM increases consumer confidence in choosing a product or service. However, Henim & Sari's research (2020) shows that negative WOM can have the opposite impact, so it is important for IIB Darmajaya to maintain service quality and customer satisfaction to avoid these negative impacts.

3.1.4.4 The Effect of Consumer Satisfaction on College Decisions

Consumer satisfaction has been proven to have a significant influence on college decisions. This research is also supported by the findings of Fanani et al. (2021), which show that consumer satisfaction is a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between service quality and purchase decisions. Thus, maintaining and increasing consumer satisfaction is a key strategy for IIB Darmajaya to attract and retain students.

4. CONCLUSION

1. Service quality has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction at IIB Darmajaya. This means that the better the service quality, the more it will affect consumer satisfaction at IIB Darmajaya.
2. Brand image has a positive and significant effect on consumer satisfaction at IIB Darmajaya. This means that the better or more famous the brand image you have, it will affect consumer satisfaction with iIB Darmajaya.
3. Word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on consumer satisfaction at IIB Darmajaya. This means that the more people do word of mouth, the more it affects consumer satisfaction at IIB Darmajaya.
4. The quality of service has a positive and insignificant effect on the decision to study at IIB Darmajaya. This means that even though fast and appropriate academic services and friendly and professional staff are appreciated by consumers, other things need to be done to attract consumers to study at IIB Darmajaya
5. Brand Image has a positive and insignificant effect on the decision to study at IIB Darmajaya. This means that even though it has a strong image, consumer perception of other factors can be the determinant.
6. Word of Mouth has a positive and significant influence on the decision to study at IIB Darmajaya. This means that word of mouth is a very effective marketing tool because the information conveyed is personal and reliable. In the case of IIB Darmajaya, recommendations from alumni and students play an important role in influencing the decision of prospective students
7. Consumer satisfaction was proven to have a significant influence on college decisions, showing the importance of satisfaction as a mediating variable between independent variables and college decisions.

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