

Determinants of Word of Mouth in Universities: A Study of Private Universities in Banten, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In facing this globalization Era, the wheel of educational competition must be designed in such a way that the educational process can go hand in hand with the development of advanced technology. many potential residents of Banten who will continue their education to college. This study aims to determine and analyze the impact of Brand Image, service quality, and Customer Relationship Management on word of mouth in private universities in Banten. In this study the sample size is determined in the form of statistical tests that will be used is a model of structural Equation Modeling (SEM). the sample in this study was as many as 354 student respondents from 5 private universities in Banten province, while the population in this study was 32,637 students. The sampling method used in this study is to use probability sampling. Questionnaires collected data. The Data were analyzed by structural equation modeling (SEM) and its tools using Lisrel 8.80. The results revealed that brand image has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth, Service Quality has a positive and significant impact on word of mouth, and Customer Relationship Management has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth.

Keywords: Brand image, service quality, Relationship Management, Word of Mouth

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INTRODUCTION

Universities as one of the educational institutions, become one of the important means of education in the process of transferring values and knowledge that takes place between educators, namely lecturers and students as learners, so that the process is expected to be able to print superior individuals and be able to make a significant contribution to the progress of the nation (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015; Nazari-Shirkouhi *et al.*, 2020). In facing this globalization Era, the wheel of educational competition must be designed in such a way that the educational process can go hand in hand with the development of advanced technology. With the educational process that moves along with the development of technology, it will create quality human beings. Universities need to have good management performance in planning strategies oriented to building high competitiveness (Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2019; Castro Benavides *et al.*, 2020). Competition between universities is getting tougher, and students are also increasingly critical in choosing a college. The management of private universities is increasingly complex due to external variables such as public and other public universities that can be an opportunity and at the same time a threat.

Banten is the result of the expansion of West Java in 2000. The formation of this province brought a significant impact on the development of higher education in the region. Banten provincial government realizes the importance of developing quality human resources to support economic growth and regional development. The existence of universities in Banten is also expected to empower local communities by providing education and training relevant to the needs of the region. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Banten in 2022 is about 12.2 million people. Many potential residents of Banten who will continue their education to college.

Word of Mouth (WOM) is a phenomenon in which individuals talk about their experiences or give recommendations about a product, service or topic to others. In the college context, WOM refers to conversations and recommendations made by students, alumni, faculty, and the surrounding community about a college or university (Dandis *et al.*, 2022). Word of Mouth (WOM) in the college context refers to communication and recommendations made by individuals or groups regarding their experience with a college to others (Schlesinger *et al.*, 2023). This is one of the important factors in influencing the choice of prospective students in choosing a college.

In the context of Higher Education, a good brand image can influence students' decisions in choosing a university or study program (Juliana and Johan, 2020). Therefore, it is important for universities to pay attention and build a positive brand image in order to increase word of mouth and appeal to prospective students. Factors that affect the quality of Service has a significant effect on word of mouth in universities (Aulia and Sendjaja, 2015). CRM has a positive effect on business performance, customer satisfaction and loyalty, which can indirectly affect WOM (Tanuwijaya, 2012). the combination of a strong brand image, high quality of Service, and effective customer relationship management can create a positive WOM supportive environment. Customers who are satisfied and have a good relationship with the brand tend to be more active in recommending products or services to others. A good WOM can have a significant impact on business growth, as it can create trust and increase brand awareness among potential customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word Of Mouth

Word of Mouth (WOM) is an oral communication or recommendation given by an individual to another individual about a particular product, service, brand, or experience. WOM is an important form of personal communication between individuals that can influence consumer perceptions, decisions, and behavior (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020). In a business context, WOM is often used as a powerful marketing strategy because recommendations from friends, family, or business associates tend to be more convincing and have a significant influence on purchasing decisions (Bartschat *et al.*, 2022). WOM is not something that can be directly controlled by the company, but the company can influence WOM through good service, high-quality products, and marketing strategies that invite positive discussions (Taheri *et al.*, 2021).

In the context of college or higher education, WOM refers to the process by which students or other individuals speak, provide information, or share their experiences about a college or university to prospective students or other parties interested in continuing their studies at that college. Word of mouth in a college context can include various aspects, such as (Schlesinger *et al.*, 2023):

1. Reputation of the college: students and alumni who are satisfied with their experience at the college can speak positively about the College, helping to build a good reputation.
2. Quality of Education: prospective students can hear about the quality of academic programs, lecturers, and facilities from people who have attended education at the college.
3. Student experience: students who have had positive experiences with campus life, clubs, student organizations, or support services can share their experiences with prospective students.
4. Alumni Achievement: the success of alumni in their careers after graduating from college can be an important factor discussed in WOM.

Word of mouth has a significant role in the decision of choosing a college. Prospective students tend to seek information from reliable sources, such as friends, family, or college alumni who want to provide insight into what can be expected during their studies there. Along with the development of technology and social media, WOM can also be spread through online platforms, such as college reviews, discussion forums, and social media, which can influence more people looking for information about colleges.

Brand Image

Brand image is the perception or image owned by a brand or brand in the eyes of consumers. It includes all aspects associated with the brand, including the positive or negative image, reputation, characteristics of the product or service, brand values, and consumer experience associated with the brand. Brand image is very important in marketing because it can influence consumers' decisions to buy products or use services from the brand (Alwi *et al.*, 2020). A positive brand image can increase consumer loyalty, create trust, and differentiate the brand from competitors. Conversely, a negative brand image can hinder growth and reduce consumer interest in interacting with the brand (Dam and Dam, 2021).

To manage brand image well, companies must understand how their brands are seen by consumers, conduct appropriate branding strategies, maintain product or service quality, and ensure consistency in brand messages and experiences throughout interactions with consumers (Mardhotillah *et al.*, 2021).

College Brand image refers to the image or perception held by the community, prospective students, alumni, and other stakeholders of the college. It covers how the college is viewed in terms of reputation, quality of Education, Academic Programs, core values, culture, achievement, and student experience (Twum *et al.*, 2021). The college's Brand image plays an important role in attracting prospective students, retaining alumni, gaining financial support, and establishing relationships with industry and the community (Panda *et al.*, 2019).

Some elements that can affect a college's brand image include (Sanny *et al.*, 2020):

1. Reputation: a college's reputation in terms of quality of education, research, and contribution to society can have a major impact on its brand image.
2. Academic programs: the quality of study programs, faculty, and academic facilities affect the perception of a college's academic excellence.
3. Student experience: the learning experience, campus life, extracurricular activities, and support services provided to students can form a positive or negative image about the college.
4. Alumni: the achievements of alumni and their contributions to the professional world and society can reflect the quality of a college education.
5. Culture and values: the values and culture of a college can also influence how a college is viewed by various parties.
6. Communication and Branding: colleges' efforts in promoting themselves, whether through marketing, brand image, and the message conveyed, can play a big role in shaping their image.

Managing a college's brand image is an important task for institutions of higher learning because it can impact their attractiveness to prospective students, their ability to obtain financial support, and their reputation in the world of Education.

Service Quality

service quality refers to the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations or expectations (Alwi *et al.*, 2020). It is an objective measure of how well an organization or service provider delivers and meets customer needs in the context of a given service experience (Abu-Rumman

and Qawasmeh, 2022). Service quality is critical in service-focused businesses and industries such as the hospitality sector, restaurants, banking, healthcare, and many others. It is important to remember that the perception of service quality can vary from customer to customer, and can be influenced by individual expectations. Therefore, organizations often conduct research and measurements on a regular basis to understand and improve the quality of their services to match customer expectations and be able to create a positive experience (Panda *et al.*, 2019).

Quality of service in the context of higher education refers to the extent to which the college provides an educational experience that is adequate, effective, and meets the expectations of students and other stakeholders (Dam and Dam, 2021). The quality of college Services is an important aspect in ensuring quality education and building a good reputation (Sanny *et al.*, 2020). Here are some elements related to the quality of service in higher education (Rozak *et al.*, 2022):

1. Academic quality: the quality of education is a major element in the quality of college services. It includes the quality of study programs, curriculum, teaching methods, and expertise of lecturers. Students expect teaching to be of high quality and relevant to their chosen discipline.
2. Quality of facilities: physical facilities such as lecture buildings, laboratories, libraries, sports facilities, etc., play an important role in the quality of services. Good facilities create a comfortable and efficient learning environment.
3. Quality of Student Services: this aspect includes academic services, career encouragement, counseling, financial support, and other services that assist students in achieving their academic goals. Colleges that prioritize the quality of student services tend to be more successful in retaining and supporting students.
4. Quality of academic and Administrative Staff: College staff must have competence and a good attitude towards students. They should be able to provide guidance, answers to questions, and support as needed.
5. The quality of the Student Experience: the Student Experience outside of the classroom is also important. It includes extracurricular activities, student clubs, social life, and self-development opportunities. A rich student experience can improve service quality.
6. Quality of Technology Support Services: in the digital age, technology plays an important role in supporting teaching and learning. The quality of technological infrastructure and technical support is a significant factor in the quality of Service.
7. Quality monitoring and Evaluation: colleges need to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to measure the quality of their services and identify areas that need improvement.

Good service quality in college can increase student satisfaction, build loyalty, and improve the reputation of the college. Therefore, colleges often invest in improving the quality of their services as part of their efforts to provide a superior and attractive education to prospective students.

Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a business approach used to manage and strengthen the relationship between a company and its customers (Saleem, 2019). These are strategies and practices designed to understand, interact and meet customer needs more effectively. The main goals of CRM are to increase customer loyalty, improve customer retention, and optimize the customer experience. CRM can be applied across a wide range of industries and sectors, from retail to financial services, healthcare, and more. It is an essential tool in building and maintaining healthy relationships with customers in an increasingly competitive business world (Pradana, 2022).

CRM involves the collection, analysis, and use of customer data to understand customer preferences, needs, and behaviors (Foltean *et al.*, 2019). This allows the company to interact with customers in a more personalized and efficient way. With the help of technology, such as CRM software, companies can automate many aspects of customer management, such as data collection, customer history tracking, contact scheduling, and performance analysis of marketing campaigns.

The application of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the context of higher education refers to the efforts of higher education institutions to understand, meet, and maintain good relationships with various stakeholders, such as students, prospective students, alumni, faculty, and administrative staff (Nazal and Megdadi, 2019). The main goal of CRM in higher education is to improve the experience and satisfaction of stakeholders, as well as improve the operational efficiency of educational institutions. Here are some relevant aspects in the sense of college CRM (Shah *et al.*, 2021):

1. Student Services: CRM helps colleges in providing better services to students. This includes understanding student needs, providing appropriate academic and non-academic support, and providing effective communication channels.
2. Student Recruitment: CRM helps colleges in the recruitment process of prospective students. By analyzing prospective student data, institutions can identify potential prospects and design marketing campaigns accordingly.
3. Alumni Engagement: CRM helps in maintaining relationships with alumni. This includes organizing alumni events, collecting feedback, and utilizing alumni contributions to support the development of the college.
4. Data management: CRM helps in the collection, management and analysis of stakeholder data. This allows colleges to make better decisions based on a better understanding of their stakeholders.
5. Communication Management: CRM enables educational institutions to manage communication with their stakeholders more efficiently. This includes sending emails, notifications and important information through the appropriate platforms.
6. Improved administrative efficiency: CRM can be used to automate many administrative tasks, such as student enrollment, schedule management, and staff performance appraisal, thereby improving operational efficiency.
7. Analysis and decision making: Data collected through CRM can be used to analyze trends, measure program success, and make better strategic decisions in managing colleges.

By implementing CRM, colleges can improve the quality of education they offer, increase student retention, support the development of the institution, and build stronger relationships with all their stakeholders.

Based On the above, the concept of thinking below:

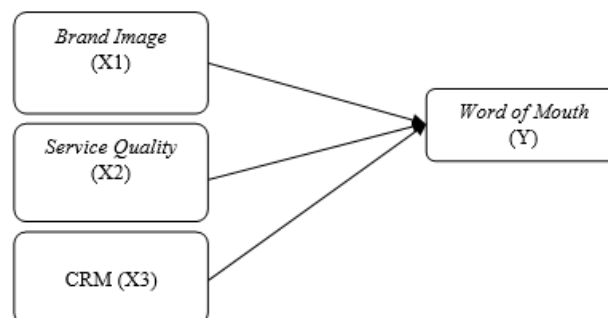


Figure 1. Frame of Thinking

Based on the above theory and conceptual of thinking, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is an effect of brand image on the word of mouth

H2 : There is an effect of service quality on the word of mouth

H3 : There is an effect of Customer Relationship Management on the word of mouth

METHOD

The type of research conducted is descriptive survey and explanatory survey. Explanatory survey method is a method of research conducted on large and small populations, the data sampled from these populations. So found the description and relationships between variables. Therefore, the type of Investigation in this study is the type of Community Investigation that states the relationship between the independent variables, namely Brand Image, Service Quality and Customer Relationship Management to WOM. In this study to obtain an overview of Brand Image, Service Quality and Customer Relationship Management to WOM in private universities in Banten province based on causal relationships. While the verification research to test the hypothesis through the collection of field data in this study will be tested whether the Brand Image, Service Quality, Customer Relationship Management effect on WOM.

Source data obtained from respondents, namely students from five private universities in Banten who answered questions from researchers. Respondents in this study were students. While secondary data is a source of research data obtained by researchers indirectly through an intermediary medium (obtained and recorded by other parties) (Nasution *et al.*, 2019). Secondary Data is generally in the form of historical evidence, records or reports that have been arranged in archives (documentaries) published and unpublished. In this case the secondary data obtained from Kemendikbudristek, which has been published in the annual report book, internet, print media and libraries

In this study the sample size is determined in the form of statistical tests that will be used is a model of structural Equation Modeling (SEM). the sample in this study was as many as 354 student respondents from 5 private universities in Banten province, while the population in this study was 32,637 students. The sampling method used in this study is to use probability sampling.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After the distribution of the questionnaire was carried out, it was continued by analyzing the profiles of respondents and other information related to the study. The analysis is done one by one based on the questions in the questionnaire and the discussion begins with the data. Profile analysis of respondents who have been determined to consist of characteristics, namely:

Table 1. Respondent Discription

| Demographics | Description | Total | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 210 | 59.32 |
| | Male | 144 | 40.68 |
| Age (Years) | 20 | 97 | 27,4 |
| | 21 | 164 | 46,33 |
| | 22 | 84 | 23,73 |
| | 24 | 5 | 1,41 |
| | 25 | 4 | 1,13 |
| | Pamulang University | 279 | 78,81 |
| College | University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang | 40 | 11,30 |
| | Sheikh Yusuf Islamic University | 14 | 3,95 |
| | University of Serang Raya | 12 | 3,39 |
| | Buddhi Dharma University | 9 | 2,54 |

Reliability Test

This test is done to determine the level of consistency of the results of repeated measurements of the same symptoms and measuring instruments. What is meant by reliability is to show in an understanding that an instrument is reliable enough to be used as a data collection tool because the instrument is good. Reliability indicates the degree of reliability. Reliable means trustworthy, so reliable. The results of reliability testing for each variable of this study can be seen in Table 4

Table 2. Reliability test for Research variables

| No. | Variable | Cronbach's Alpha Value | Results |
|-----|---|------------------------|----------|
| 1. | <i>Brand Image</i> | 0.856 | Reliable |
| 2. | <i>Service Quality</i> | 0.888 | Reliable |
| 3. | <i>Customer Relationship Management</i> | 0.891 | Reliable |
| 4. | <i>Word of Mouth</i> | 0.921 | Reliable |

Based on Table 4 that each variable gets the value of cronbach's alpha > 0.7 means that the instrument can be said to be reliable

Validity Test

The results of testing the validity of the question items on the questionnaire for each variable with $r > 0.361$, showed that all items have a correlation value greater than 0.361. This means that all question items are valid.

Table 3. Validity Test for Research variables

| Item Kuesioner | r_{hitung} | Sig | Noted |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------|-------|
| <i>Brand Image</i> | | | |
| CI1 | 0.532** | 0.002 | Valid |
| CI2 | 0.610** | 0.000 | Valid |
| CI3 | 0.514** | 0.004 | Valid |
| CI4 | 0.609** | 0.000 | Valid |
| CI5 | 0.610** | 0.000 | Valid |
| UI1 | 0.735** | 0.000 | Valid |
| UI2 | 0.795** | 0.000 | Valid |
| UI3 | 0.778** | 0.000 | Valid |
| UI4 | 0.571** | 0.001 | Valid |
| UI5 | 0.498** | 0.000 | Valid |
| PI1 | 0.535** | 0.000 | Valid |
| PI2 | 0.431** | 0.000 | Valid |
| PI3 | 0.445** | 0.000 | Valid |
| PI4 | 0.506** | 0.000 | Valid |
| P15 | 0.567** | 0.000 | Valid |
| <i>Service Quality</i> | | | |
| RL1 | 0.721** | 0.000 | Valid |
| RL2 | 0.687** | 0.000 | Valid |

| Item Kuesioner | r_{hitung} | Sig | Noted |
|---|--------------|-------|-------|
| RL3 | 0.710** | 0.000 | Valid |
| AS1 | 0.697** | 0.000 | Valid |
| AS2 | 0.709** | 0.000 | Valid |
| AS3 | 0.479** | 0.007 | Valid |
| TA1 | 0.620** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TA2 | 0.710** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TA3 | 0.697** | 0.000 | Valid |
| EM1 | 0.394** | 0.031 | Valid |
| EM2 | 0.609** | 0.000 | Valid |
| EM3 | 0.596** | 0.001 | Valid |
| RE1 | 0.700** | 0.000 | Valid |
| RE2 | 0.407** | 0.025 | Valid |
| RE3 | 0.646** | 0.000 | Valid |
| Customer Relationship Management | | | |
| AW1 | 0.611** | 0.000 | Valid |
| AW2 | 0.668** | 0.000 | Valid |
| AW3 | 0.548** | 0.002 | Valid |
| IC1 | 0.637** | 0.000 | Valid |
| IC2 | 0.671** | 0.000 | Valid |
| IC3 | 0.698** | 0.000 | Valid |
| EX1 | 0.570** | 0.001 | Valid |
| EX2 | 0.465** | 0.010 | Valid |
| EX3 | 0.671** | 0.000 | Valid |
| CM1 | 0.643** | 0.000 | Valid |
| CM2 | 0.731** | 0.000 | Valid |
| CM3 | 0.679** | 0.000 | Valid |
| DI1 | 0.608** | 0.000 | Valid |
| DI2 | 0.716** | 0.000 | Valid |
| DI3 | 0.549** | 0.002 | Valid |
| Word of Mouth (WM) | | | |
| TL1 | 0.734** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TL2 | 0.800** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TL3 | 0.805** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TP1 | 0.734** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TP2 | 0.583** | 0.001 | Valid |
| TP3 | 0.639** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TS1 | 0.524** | 0.003 | Valid |
| TS2 | 0.805** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TS3 | 0.774** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TA1 | 0.526** | 0.003 | Valid |
| TA2 | 0.800** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TA3 | 0.731** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TR1 | 0.599** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TR2 | 0.755** | 0.000 | Valid |
| TR3 | 0.575** | 0.001 | Valid |

Full SEM using Lisrel 8.80 is as shown in Figure 2

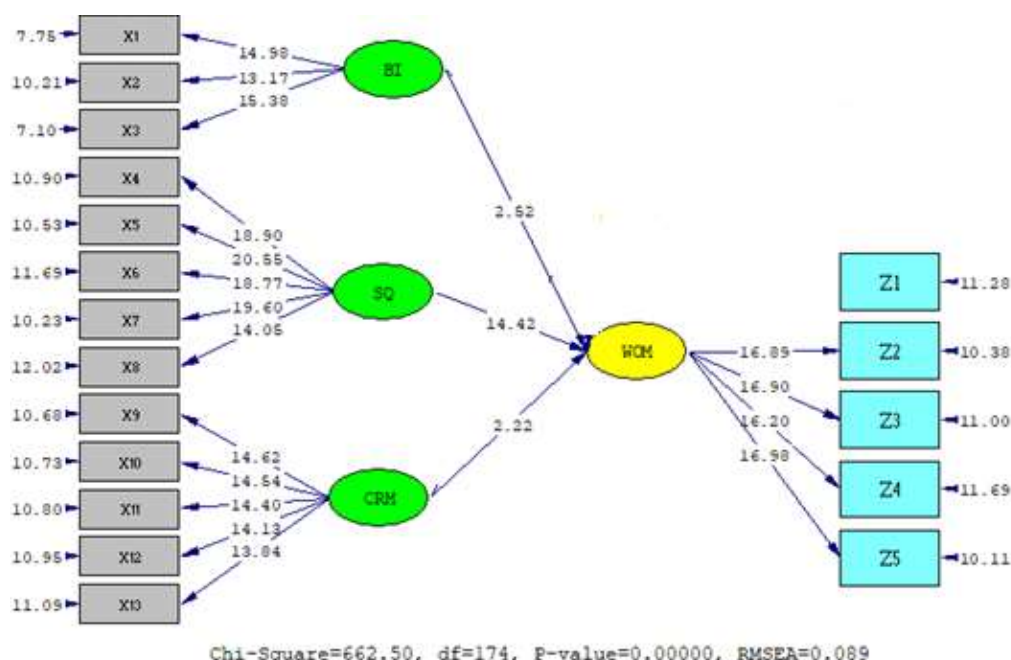


Figure 2. Full Model SEM (*t-Model*)

Hypothesis Test

The results of testing the significance of the relationship between latent variables can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Significance Between Variables

| No | Structural Trajectory | Path Coefficient | value | criteria | Test Results |
|----|--|------------------|-------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | Brand Image → Word of mouth | 0.08 | 2.52 | 1.96 | Significance |
| 2 | Service Quality → Word of mouth | 0.86 | 14.42 | 1.96 | Significance |
| 3 | Customer Relationship Management → Word of mouth | 0.10 | 2.22 | 1.96 | Significance |

Based on Table 5 that the resulting coefficient values are all structural trajectories have a value $t_{value} \geq 1.96$. then the coefficients of all trajectories are expressed as significant.

The Effect of Brand Image on Word of Mouth

Brand Image variables partially show a significant effect on Word of mouth, this is evidenced by the significant t-value test has a tvalue value of $2.52 > 1.96$ (criterion value) and the path coefficient of 0.08 against Word of mouth. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.08)^2 = 0.64\%$. From this hypothesis, H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected.

The Effect of Service Quality on Word of Mouth

Service Quality variables partially showed a significant effect on Word of Mouth, this is evidenced by the significant Test t-value has a t-value of $14.42 > 1.96$ (criterion value) and the path coefficient of

0.86 against Word of Mouth. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.86)^2 = 73.96\%$. From this hypothesis, H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected.

The Effect of Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth

Variable Customer Relationship Management shows that there is a significant effect on Word of mouth, this is evidenced by the significant Test t-value has a tvalue of $2.61 > 1.96$ (criterion value) and the path coefficient of 0.10 against Word of mouth. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.10)^2 = 1\%$. From this hypothesis, H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected.

Discussion

The effect of Brand Image on Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province

Based on the results of research data which were then carried out statistical tests showed that the Brand Image is reflected in the product Image dimension has a significant effect on Word of mouth is reflected by the Tracking dimension with an effect of 0.08. This means that the Product Image as measured by the level of complete laboratory facilities, provides a dominant indication in forming a Brand Image that also has an impact on increasing Word of mouth reflected by Tracking. The results of this study are in line with the results of research conducted by (Sumartias and Nuraryo, 2017), university brand image has positive impact on WOM communication.

The effect of Service Quality on Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province

Based on the results of research data which were then carried out statistical tests showed that Service Quality is reflected in the assurance dimension has a significant effect on Word of mouth is reflected by the Tracking dimension with an effect of 0.86. This means that the Emphaty is measured by providing excellent service, providing a dominant indication in forming Service Quality which also has an impact on increasing Word of mouth which is reflected by Tracking. The results of this study are in line with the results of research conducted by (Munap and Yahaya, 2019) that the five dimensions of service quality have a significant but weak relationship with WOM.

The effect of Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province

Based on the results of research data that were then carried out statistical tests showed that Customer Relationship Management is reflected in the awareness dimension has a significant effect on Word of mouth is reflected by the Tracking dimension with an effect of 0.10. This means that awareness which is measured by the level of internship or practical work cooperation, provides a dominant indication in forming Customer Relationship Management which also has an impact on increasing Word of mouth reflected by Tracking. The results of this study are in line with the results of research conducted by (Rosyidi, 2015) mention that the two independent variables CRM (X1) and (X2) have a positive and significant effect on consumer behavior WOM (Y).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the study, the conclusions are as follows: brand image has an effect on Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province because the value t-value has a t-value of $2.52 > 1.96$ (criterion value) and the path coefficient of 0.08 to Customer Trust. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.08)^2 = 0.64\%$; Service Quality affects Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province because the value of t-value has a t-value of $14.42 > 1.96$ (the value of the criteria) and the coefficient of 0.84 to the path of Customer Trust. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.84)^2 = 73.96\%$;

Customer Relationship Management has an effect on Word of Mouth in private universities in Banten province because t-value has a t-value value of $2.61 > 1.96$ (criterion value) and a path coefficient of 0.10 to Customer Trust. The magnitude of the coefficient shows the amount of direct influence contribution of $(0.10)^2 = 1\%$;

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