## The Role Of Student Satisfaction In The Roots Of Determining Word Of Mouth

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**Abstract**

This study aims to determine the effect of service quality and Word Of Mouth (WOM) on student satisfaction at the University of Semarang as an Intervening Variable. The independent variable in this study is the quality of service and the dependent variable is Word of Mouth (WOM) while the Intervening Variable is student satisfaction at the University of Semarang. The research was conducted by taking a sample of 129 students of the University of Semarang. The research method uses accident sampling. The technical analysis in this study uses Path analysis. The result shows that service quality and satisfaction directly effect the Word Of Mouth (WOM) of the University of Semarang students. Service quality) has a direct influence on student satisfaction at the University of Semarang and satisfaction is able to moderate the effect of service quality on the Word Of Mouth (WOM) of of the University of Semarang students.

**Keywords :** Service Quality, Satisfaction, Word Of Mouth

## INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction with products/services can only be attained if marketers can create and maintain positive emotional relationships with consumers. Building and maintaining customer satisfaction is crucial because it is the key to successful long-term relationships between companies and consumers. In the field of education, student satisfaction is an effort to create good relationships between higher institutions and university students. University students who receive educational services that match or exceed expectations tend to respond to higher education positively. One of them is giving Word of Mouth (WOM) to others. WOM is an effective way to build a positive image. Besides, WOM can also increase the number of students and sales of educational services. Based on research conducted by Luo and Hamrug (2007), Wangenheim and Bayon (2007), Matos and Rossi (2008), Walsh and Mitchell (2008), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Aslam et al. (2011), Shirsavar et al. (2012), Nindhira and Fendy (2013), and Novianti and Artanti (2015), customer satisfaction significantly affected Word of Mouth (WOM).

Furthermore, a decision-making process does not only end with the occurrence of a transaction but is also followed by a post-transaction behavior stage (especially in broad decision-making). In this stage, university students feel a specific level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, influencing subsequent behavior. If satisfied, they will show great opportunities for further study in the future. In this case, service quality is the level of excellence expected and control over that level of excellence to meet customer desires

(Tjiptono, 2011). Generally, dissatisfied customers will share their bad experiences with 11 other people (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Therefore, the quality of services provided by educational businesses is the most important factor for university student satisfaction. Prayitno (2015) stated that service quality positively and significantly affected customer satisfaction. Previous research by Nataliza (2007), Akbar and Parves (2009), Nazamudin (2009), Aryani and Rosinta (2010), Kumar et al. (2010), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Istianto (2011), Rizan and Andika (2011), Resihono (2011), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Sahanggamu et al. (2015), Prayitno (2015), and Panjaitan & Yuliati (2016) examined the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction. Also, Aryska (2017) investigated the effect of service quality on patient satisfaction. The results revealed that service quality influenced satisfaction. Therefore, companies must pay attention to things considered essential by consumers and customers to be satisfied according to their expectations.

Basically, service quality and Word of Mouth (WOM) are a form of university student assessments of expected services. For universities, the key to getting students' satisfaction is their feeling levels as a result of the comparison between the expectations and the reality received from an educational service. The previous research findings from Djati & Darmawan (2004), Babin et al. (2005), Sweeney et al. (2006), Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulus (2009), Kasim & Ismail (2009), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Novianti & Artanti (2015), and Anita & Rahanatha (2015) uncovered that service quality significantly influenced the Word of Mouth (WOM).

Specifically, in Semarang City, there are many universities with various services that attract the public interest (prospective students) to continue their education to higher education. Thus, in Semarang City, there is competition between universities at an increasingly high level. Each university needs to offer its best service to get an advantage and make the university stand out from the existing competitors. One of the universities in Semarang City is the Universitas Semarang. Currently, Universitas Semarang as a service provider that is pure educational services, is required not only to prioritize the academic field but also the administrative sector. In an effort to provide or improve the best service for student satisfaction, Universitas Semarang must pay attention to its students' needs and desires. However, the problems that occurred at Universitas Semarang are that university students felt not satisfied, and it raised complaints, including parking lots that had been made but could not be used optimally, the completeness of facilities and infrastructure for lectures that were damaged and old that were not replaced, and educational administration services that tended to be slow. Therefore, Universitas Semarang is always required to improve service quality and satisfaction so that WOM communication from students continues to have a good and positive rhythm to the existence of Universitas Semarang because this WOM will be very beneficial in the long term. This research was initiated because of a research gap revealed by Saputro (2012), in which the research he had conducted provided information that service quality had a negative and insignificant effect on the Word of Mouth. On the other hand, a study carried out by Fibriyadi (2016) uncovered that service quality positively and significantly impacted the Word of Mouth.

This study tries to find solutions to problems in phenomena that occur, especially in services in public facilities. Besides, this study was initiated because of a gap in previous research, the results of research conducted by Saputra (2012) and Fibriyadi (2016).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Word of Mouth (WOM) Theory

Rahmawati (2014) stated that having loyal customers will provide many benefits, including making customers increase the proportion of spending, making customers do Word

of Mouth (WOM), making customers less sensitive to price, and making companies generate greater profits. The Word of Mouth (WOM) role is vital for service providers so that consumers are interested in consuming the services they offer. Before consuming a service, consumers often rely on information from other people who have experience consuming it or from experts based on their knowledge (Sinaga, 2011).

One of the ways to create Word of Mouth (WOM) is by fulfilling customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction for the company will enable the creation of a good Word of Mouth (WOM) in the long run so that more people buy and use products or services (Agustina, 2011). Customer satisfaction is seen as one of the best factors for future profits.

Word of Mouth (WOM) gives customers a reason to talk about products and services and makes it easier for those conversations to happen. Word of Mouth (WOM) is the art and science of building good, mutually beneficial communication from customer to customer and customer to the producer. Customers with a strong service view tend to be more vocal about their experiences than mediocre ones, and dissatisfied customers will speak much louder than satisfied customers.

## Service Quality Theory

Tjiptono (2011) argued that service quality is the level of excellence expected and control over that level of excellence to meet customer desires. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), there are five dimensions of service quality: 1) Tangibles (physical evidence), namely the physical appearance of company services, such as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, cleanliness, tidiness, and communication media; 2) Empathy, namely the willingness of employees and employers to be more concerned about giving personal attention to customers; 3) Reliability, namely the company's ability to carry out the promised services appropriately and reliably; 4) Responsiveness, namely the company's responsiveness in providing services to customers and providing services swiftly and quickly in handling transactions and customer complaints; 5) Assurance, namely the company's ability to guarantee service, which is the knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to generate trust and confidence.

According to Lovelock (2010), customers will be quite satisfied as long as the management is felt between the tolerance zone, which is above an adequate service level. Meanwhile, one way to create customer satisfaction is through quality improvement because customers are the main focus when disclosing satisfaction and service quality (Lupiyoadi, 2013).

In determining the quality of service, efforts are made to meet expectations. Tjiptono (2011) defined service quality as the level of perfection expected and controlled for this perfection to meet customer desires. If the service received is as expected, then the service quality is perceived as good and satisfying. If the service received exceeds customer expectations, then the service quality is perceived as ideal. Conversely, if the service received is lower than expected, the service quality is considered bad. Nataliza (2007), Akbar and Parves (2009), Nazamudin (2009), Aryani and Rosinta (2010), Kumar et al. (2010), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Istianto (2011), Rizan and Andika (2011), Resihono (2011), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Sahanggamu et al. (2015), Prayitno (2015), and Panjaitan & Yuliati (2016) examined the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction and Aryska (2017) also researched the effect of service quality on patient satisfaction; the results showed that service quality affected satisfaction.

According to Sinaga (2011), service quality has many benefits and advantages; besides creating customer satisfaction, service quality is an effort that can create a Word of Mouth (WOM), which can run well. Companies can create a good Word of Mouth (WOM) by providing a good experience for customers. Good quality service will trigger customers to tell it to their closest colleagues. Vice versa, if a customer feels poor service quality, he will

complain about the experience even more loudly. Thus, if service performance approaches or exceeds the desired service level, customers will be pleased. These customers are very likely to make repeat purchases, remain loyal, and spread positive WOM (Lovelock, 2010). Based on research from Djati & Darmawan (2004), Babin et al. (2005), Sweeney et al. (2006), Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulus (2009), Kasim & Ismail (2009), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Novianti & Artanti (2015), and Anita & Rahanatha (2015), service quality had a significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM). It signifies that good service quality would affect the Word of Mouth (WOM) of consumers to their closest colleagues regarding the quality of service they have felt in a service.

**Satisfaction Theory**

As Kotler and Keller (2012) stated, consumer satisfaction is the feeling of someone satisfied or vice versa after comparing the expectations and reality received from a product or service. Thus, the level of satisfaction is a function of the difference between reality and expectations. Tjiptono (2011) stated that several cores have in common among the various ways of measuring customer satisfaction. 1) Overall customer satisfaction: the simplest way to measure customer satisfaction is to directly ask consumers how satisfied they are with a specific product or service. 2) Dimensions of customer satisfaction: a. Identify the key dimensions of consumers. b. Ask consumers to rate a company's products or services based on specific items, such as speed of service or friendliness of customer staff, and ask consumers to rate a competitor's products or services based on the same specific items. c. Ask consumers to determine which dimensions they think are most important in assessing overall customer satisfaction. 3) Confirmation of expectations, namely the conformity or mismatch between consumer expectations and the actual performance of the company's products. 4) Repurchase interest: consumer satisfaction is measured behaviorally by asking whether consumers will shop using the company's services again. Quality services can create customer satisfaction, where the quality of the service will enter the consumers' minds so that they are perceived as good. 5) Willingness to recommend products to friends or family is an important measure to analyze and follow up on.

Lovelock (2010) revealed that Word of Mouth (WOM) had a very close relationship with the satisfaction level generated to a certain degree and content. One benefit of customer satisfaction for the company is that it allows the creation of Word of Mouth/WOM recommendations, which are very beneficial for the company in the long run so that more people buy and use these products or services (Agustina, 2011). Based on studies carried out by Luo and Hamrug (2007), Wangenheim and Bayon (2007), Matos and Rossi (2008), Walsh and Mitchell (2008), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Aslam et al. (2011), Shirsavar et al. (2012), Nindhira and Fendy (2013), and Novianti and Artanti (2015), customer satisfaction significantly impacted Word of Mouth (WOM).

**Method**

This causal research type used a quantitative approach based on the positivism philosophy. The population in this study were Universitas Semarang students registered in the Study Plan Card (KRS) at the odd semester of 2019/2020. The number of research samples based on the Slovin formula was 117 students. The sampling technique was accident sampling, while the analysis method was Path Analysis. This method was employed to examine the effect of the independent variable (service quality) on the dependent variable (WOM) and the mediating variable (satisfaction). The calculations were carried out with the model, as follows:

$$K = b_1KL + e_1$$

WOM= b1 KL + b2K + e2

Description:

KL = Independent variable (service quality)
K = Mediating variable (satisfaction)
WOM = Dependent variable (Word of Mouth/WOM)
b1 = Service quality regression coefficient
b2 = Satisfaction regression coefficient
e = Outside factors

Moreover, testing the instrument's validity was performed using the Pearson correlation formula, classical assumption tests (multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, normality, determination test, and hypothesis testing), and mediation test (Sobel test).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### F test

The F test or referred to as the simultaneous model test, is the initial step in identifying the regression model estimated to be feasible or not. Feasible (reliable) here means that the estimated model is suitable for explaining the independent variables' effect on the dependent variable. If the value of prob. F-calculated (SPSS output shown in the sig. column) is smaller than the error rate (alpha) of 0.05 (which has been determined), it can be said that the estimated regression model is feasible. Meanwhile, if the value of prob. F-calculated is higher than the error rate of 0.05, it can be said that the estimated regression model is not feasible. The F test results can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. F Test

**ANOVAª**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Regression | 108,242 | 2 | 36,081 | **29,990** | **,000ᵇ** |
| 1 | Residual | 46,921 | 127 | 1,203 | | |
| | Total | 155,163 | 129 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: WOM

b. Predictors: (Constant), K, KL

Source: 2020

From table 1 F test results in this study, the value of prob F-calculated (sig) of 0.000 was obtained, less than the 0.05 significance level. Thus, it could be concluded that the model was feasible and appropriate to use to explain/measure the effect of service quality and satisfaction on the Word of Mouth (WOM).

### Equation 1 Model Analysis: The Effect of Service Quality on Student Satisfaction

In this equation model test, the author analyzed using simple regression, where the author tested the effect of service quality on student satisfaction. The model analysis results in this equation can be seen in Tables 2 and 3 below.

**Table 2. Determination Coefficient Test for Equation Model 1**

**Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .315[a] | .099 | .091 | 1.924 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), KL

Based on Table 2, R square is referred to as the determination coefficient, which in this case means that 9.99% satisfaction could be explained by the service quality variable, while the remaining 90.01% was explained by other causes outside the independent variables used in the study. This study strengthens previous studies that service quality had a strong effect on satisfaction.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing The Effect of Service Quality on Student Satisfaction

**Coefficients[a]**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 9.305 | 1.449 | | 6.420 | .000 |
| | KL | .327 | .092 | .315 | 3.555 | .001 |

a. Dependent Variable: K

Table 3 displays that the significance value was 0.001 <0.05. It means that there was a direct positive effect of service quality on student satisfaction at Universitas Semarang, so that Ha was accepted. Hence, H1, stating that there is a direct effect of service quality on student satisfaction at Universitas Semarang, was accepted. The quality of service was felt by students, so that it affected student satisfaction, caused by physical and non-physical factors. The physical factor considered essential by students was the existence of adequate parking space. Besides, non-physical factors also influenced student satisfaction. It can be achieved as a result of the quality of services provided by employees, such as speed in handling student problems and thoroughness in processes, especially in the academic field, which provides additional reinforcement to service quality that impacts student satisfaction.

This study's results align with the theory put forward by Tjiptono (2011), suggesting that service quality is the level of perfection expected and controlled for this perfection to meet customer desires. If the service received is as expected, then the quality of the service is perceived as good and satisfying. Moreover, this study's results also support the previous studies' results: Nataliza (2007), Akbar and Parves (2009), Nazamudin (2009), Aryani and Rosinta (2010), Kumar et al. (2010), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Istianto (2011), Rizan and Andika (2011), Resihono (2011), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Sahanggamu et al. (2015), Prayitno (2015), and Panjaitan & Yuliati (2016), who inspected the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction and Aryska (2017), who also examined the effect of service quality on patient satisfaction. Those results uncovered that service quality affected satisfaction.

**Equation Model Analysis 2: The Effect of Service Quality and Student Satisfaction on Word of Mouth (WOM)**

Table 4.  Results of the Determination Coefficient Test for Equation 2 Model:
The Effect of Service Quality and Student Satisfaction on Word of Mouth (WOM)

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**Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .494[a] | .244 | .231 | 2.154 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), K, KL

Based on Table 4, the R square value was 0.244 (is the square of the correlation coefficient or 0.494 x 0.494 = 0.244). R square is referred to as the coefficient of determination, which in this case, indicates that 24.4% of the Word of Mouth (WOM) could be explained by the variables of service quality and satisfaction. Meanwhile, the remaining 75.6% was explained by causes other than the independent variables employed in the study.

**Table 5. Results of Equation 2 Model Analysis:**
**The Effect of Service Quality and Student Satisfaction on Word of Mouth (WOM)**

**Coefficients[a]**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.815 | 1.892 | | 2.017 | .046 |
| | KL | .436 | .104 | .359 | 4.180 | .000 |
| | K | .310 | .109 | .245 | 2.853 | .005 |

a. Dependent Variable: WOM

In accordance with Table 5 above, the effect of service quality on Word of Mouth (WOM) is as follows. The t-calculated value was 4.180, with a b1 of 0.395 and a significance value of 0.000 <0.05. It denotes a direct positive effect of service quality on the Word of Mouth (WOM) so that Ha was accepted, and Ho was rejected. Thus, H3, stating that there is a direct effect of service quality on Word of Mouth (WOM), was accepted.

According to this study's results, service quality influenced the Word of Mouth (WOM). Service quality, such as the ability of employees to provide suggestions and solutions to problems faced by students and the existence of empathy for students, affected improving the quality of service felt by students. Thus, this effect reinforces students in spreading the news (Word of Mouth) to others. With the students' ability to spread the good news and bad news, the employees' ability to improve service quality would impact students' Word of Mouth (WOM). Because one of the Word of Mouth (WOM) carried out by students is to invite friends or family to enroll in Universitas Semarang, if the Word of Mouth (WOM) spread by students is positive, it will have a good impact on the Universitas Semarang.

This study's results are in accordance with the theory put forward by Lovelock (2010) that good service quality will trigger customers to tell this to their closest colleagues. Vice versa, if a customer feels poor service quality, he will complain about the experience even more loudly. Thus, if service performance approaches or exceeds the desired service level, customers will be pleased. These customers are very likely to make repeat purchases, remain loyal, and will spread positive WOM. Furthermore, this study's results are consistent with the previous studies' results: Djati & Darmawan (2004), Babin et al. (2005), Sweeney et

al. (2006), Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulus (2009), Kasim & Ismail (2009), Ardani and Wayan (2011), Novianti & Artanti (2015), and Anita & Rahanatha (2015), revealing that service quality significantly influenced Word of Mouth (WOM). It signifies that good service quality would affect the Word of Mouth (WOM) of consumers to their closest colleagues regarding the quality of service they have felt in a service.

Based on Table 5 above, the relationship between student satisfaction and Word of Mouth (WOM) is as follows. The t-calculated value was 4.180, with a b2 of 0.359 and a significance value of 0.000 <0.05. It indicates a direct positive relationship of satisfaction with the Word of Mouth (WOM) so that Ha was accepted, and Ho was rejected. Therefore, H2, stating that there is a direct effect of student satisfaction on the Word of Mouth (WOM), was accepted. In this case, one of the indicators of student satisfaction with the Universitas Semarang is the desire not to change campuses until graduation. The unwillingness to move campuses is one indicator of students at Universitas Semarang being satisfied with the entire academic community's performance, both physical (parking space, internet access speed, and classrooms) and non-physical (speed, accuracy, and employee empathy). Another indicator of satisfied students is the pride of students studying at Universitas Semarang. This pride could be seen in the frequency of students posting their personal lives on social media related to campus activities.

This study's results agree with the theory put forward by Lovelock (2010), showing that to a certain level and content, Word of Mouth (WOM) had a very close relationship with the satisfaction level produced. One benefit of customer satisfaction for the company is that it allows the creation of recommendations from Word of Mouth/WOM, which are very beneficial for the company in the long term so that more people buy and use these products or services (Agustina, 2011). Additionally, this study's results align with the previous studies' results: Luo and Hamrug (2007), Wangenheim and Bayon (2007), Matos and Rossi (2008), Walsh and Mitchell (2008), Prameswari & Andjarwati (2010), Aslam et al. (2011), Shirsavar et al. (2012), Nindhira and Fendy (2013), Novianti and Artanti (2015) that customer satisfaction had a significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM).

**The total effect of service quality on Word of Mouth (WOM):**

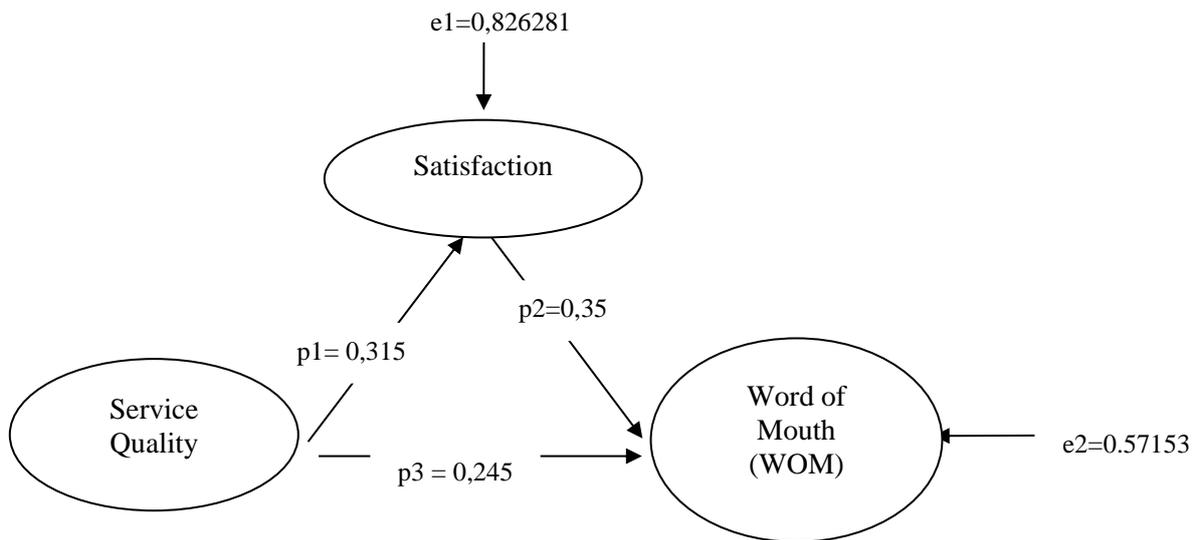| The direct impact of service quality on Word of Mouth (WOM) | (p3) | | = | 0,245 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The indirect effect of service quality on Word of Mouth (WOM) | (p1=0,315 p2=0,359) | x | = | <u>0.113085</u> |
| Total correlation effect of service quality to Word of Mouth (WOM) | (p3+(p1xp2) | | = | **<u>0,358085</u>** |

Figure 1.  Mediation Test Word of Mouth (WOM)

**Mediation or Intervening Test**

Based on the previous regression analysis results on the total effect of service quality, 0.358085 was obtained, and the effect of service quality directly on the Word of Mouth (WOM) was 0.245. Thus, it could be seen that the total effect> direct effect, or 0.358085> 0.245 on service quality. Hence, it could be explained that satisfaction could act as an intervening variable or mediate the effect of service quality on the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students. Therefore, there was an effect of service quality on the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students through satisfaction as an intervening variable. This study's results reinforce the previous research results from Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulus (2009), Kasim and Ismail (2009), Djati and Darmawan (2004), Anita & Rahanatha (2015), which revealed that service quality affected the Word of Mouth through customer satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

Service quality had a direct effect on student satisfaction at Universitas Semarang. It means that the better the quality of service from Universitas Semarang, the higher the student satisfaction at Universitas Semarang. Satisfaction had a direct effect on the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students. It indicates that the higher the satisfaction, the higher the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students. The quality of service directly affected the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students, meaning that the better the quality of service from Universitas Semarang, the higher the Word of Mouth (WOM) of Universitas Semarang students. Universitas Semarang student satisfaction influenced their Word of Mouth (WOM) through service quality as an intervening variable. It signifies that by improving the quality of service, students' satisfaction at Universitas Semarang will increase and will be followed by an increase in the Word of Mouth (WOM).

**Suggestion**

A good service quality, satisfaction, and Word of Mouth (WOM) for Universitas Semarang students show good prospects so that prospective new students will respond to these signals positively. With the positive influence of service quality, satisfaction, and Word

of Mouth (WOM), it is possible to have positive sentiments on prospective new students to increase their competitive advantage.

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