Exploring the Influence of E-Service Quality on Brand Referral Dynamics among Malaysian Youth

[1]Nur Hidayah Ayob, [2]Mohd Safwan Ramli, [3]Mohammad Mujaheed Hassan, [4]Noor Junaini Arwin Yaacob, [5]Nurul Izzat Kamaruddin, [6]Zaidatul Nadhirah Roslan

[1,2,6] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Jengka, Pahang, Malaysia.

[4,5] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA raub, Pahang, Malaysia.

[3] Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

ABSTRACT

The quality of e-services has become a significant factor in young people's endorsement of brands in Malaysia due to the country's evolving telecom landscape. This study investigates the various elements of e-service quality, such as reliability, responsiveness, simplicity of use, personalization, security, and site design, and their impact on brand advocacy and opposition among 281 Malaysian youngsters. Data were collected using convenience sample approaches via a structured questionnaire, and the correlations were examined using Pearson-Correlation and Multiple Regression. The theoretical framework was based on the SERVQUAL theory of planned behavior and the TAM Model. The data show that responsiveness and personalization are crucial in encouraging favorable recommendations, but deficits in these areas lead to negative feedback. Furthermore, reliability and security play important roles in molding customer views and behaviors. The findings highlight the importance of strong e-service quality in affecting consumer perceptions and actions, giving actionable insights for firms looking to improve customer happiness and brand loyalty. Companies that prioritize responsiveness, personalization, reliability, and security can create favorable brand referrals while mitigating negative ones, which is critical for maintaining a competitive advantage in the digital age. This study adds to the current literature by identifying critical elements of e-service quality that impact brand referral behaviors and providing organizations with practical solutions for improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: e-service quality, brand referral, Malaysian youth, digital services, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital commerce market, brand referral and e-service quality have emerged as critical drivers of consumer engagement and business success. Brand referrals, defined as the process by which happy customers promote a brand to others, have a significant impact on a company's reputation and customer base. This type of referral is especially effective in the digital world, as social networks and online communities speed up the spread of customer opinions (Kim & Park, 2021).

On the other hand, e-service quality, which includes a company's overall efficacy and efficiency in providing digital services, has a direct impact on customer perceptions and, as a result, their propensity to endorse the brand (Li et al., 2021). The relationship between e-service quality and brand referral is supported by numerous essential factors, including dependability, responsiveness, ease of use, personalization, security, and site design. Each of these criteria has a significant impact on how consumers assess digital services, influencing their overall satisfaction and loyalty (Nguyen et al., 2022). Customers who receive high-quality digital services are more likely to return and become brand ambassadors, sharing their positive experiences across many online and offline platforms.

In contrast, e-service failures can result in negative referrals, where unsatisfied consumers discourage others,

potentially generating severe reputational damage (Wang & Chiu, 2019). Given the significance of these contacts, this article investigates how various components of e-service quality affect consumer referral behavior, both positively and adversely. By using cutting-edge research and models, we hope to provide insights that can help firms fine-tune their digital strategies to improve customer happiness and optimize the possibility for good recommendations.

Problem Statement

The quality of e-services is shown to be a crucial factor in determining youth brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction. However, there hasn't been enough research done on how youngsters perceive the direct impact of e-service quality on brand referral behaviors, both favorable and unfavorable. When consumers are unhappy with a brand, oppositional brand referrals can seriously harm the reputation of the brand. Conversely, positive brand referrals can turn happy consumers into brand evangelists who aggressively promote their favorite products. It is unclear exactly how certain e-service quality factors, such as site design, security, simplicity of use, personalization, responsiveness, and dependability, affect these referral patterns (Li et al., 2021). Businesses looking to use the power of positive recommendations and reduce the risks associated with negative feedback have a hurdle due to this information gap (Nguyen et al., 2022). The impact of e-service quality on customer happiness and loyalty is often discussed in the literature; however, there is little research on the shift from customer contentment to active brand recommendation, particularly when it comes to oppositional referrals. Studies frequently emphasize positive recommendations, but they are unclear about the circumstances in which consumers go from passive satisfaction to active advocacy (Choi & Kim, 2020).

This overlook includes a lack of knowledge of the particular e-service quality factors that have the greatest impact on youth advocacy (Martin & Todorov, 2018). Furthermore, the dynamics of oppositional referrals are frequently neglected, and there aren't many research that specifically discuss how consumers' unfavorable experiences with e-service quality components lead them to spread unfavorable rumors. For businesses that must manage and maximize their digital touchpoints in order to stop and lessen unfavorable consumer feedback, this leads to a sizable strategic knowledge gap (Wang & Chiu, 2019; Jha & Balaji, 2020).

Aspect	Statistic	Source
Positive Brand Referrals	92% of youth consumers trust recommendations from friends and family	Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising report (2015)
	Referred youth customers have a 16% higher lifetime value	Wharton School of Business study (2011)
Negative Brand Referrals	Dissatisfied youth customers tell 9-15 people about their experience	White House Office of Consumer Affairs
	31% of consumers share bad experiences online	Temkin Group study (2017)
Reliability	Reliability is a top predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty	Journal of Service Research
Responsiveness	Slow or unhelpful service leads to higher rates of negative word-of-mouth	Journal of Retailing
Ease of Use	76% of consumers say ease of use is most important in website design	Forrester Research survey
Personalization	80% of youth consumers more likely to purchase with personalized experiences	Epsilon report (2018)

	Poor personalization leads to frustration and negative referrals	Epsilon report (2018)
Security	64% of Americans have experienced a major data breach	Pew Research Center study (2017)
Web Design	38% of youth will stop engaging with unattractive websites	Adobe study (2015)

Here's a table summarizing the statistics on brand referral issues:

Theoretical Review

For a number of reasons, it is essential to comprehend the connection between brand recommendations and e-service quality aspects like responsiveness, simplicity of use, customisation, security, and web design. First off, e-service quality has a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors in the digital age, as youth consumer interactions with companies are increasingly mediated through online platforms (Harris & Goode, 2021). Good e-services can increase client happiness and loyalty, which promotes favorable brand recommendations (Wilson & Soutar, 2020). On the other hand, low-quality e-services can lead to bad experiences and oppositional brand recommendations, which can seriously harm a company's reputation and lower customer retention (Martin & Todorov, 2018).

Second, by examining these interactions, companies can gain practical insights that enhance their customer engagement and service delivery methods. Businesses should prioritize areas for investment and improvement by identifying the e-service quality components that have the greatest influence on positive or unfavorable brand referrals (Li et al., 2021). Furthermore, it's more crucial than ever to provide high security and individualized experiences because corporate transactions and customer interactions are increasingly being conducted on digital platforms. Brand loyalty may suffer greatly from security lapses or a deficiency of individualized interaction (Kim & Lee, 2021). In a same vein, user-friendliness and effective site design are essential to maintaining client interest and happiness, which directly affects their inclination to recommend or disparage the brand publicly (Chen & Sharma, 2019).

When there are many options available to consumers in a competitive market, the significance of these elements is increased. E-service quality creates a devoted customer base that actively engages in positive word-of-mouth promotion, which not only helps a brand stand out but also creates a durable competitive advantage (Jiang et al., 2018). The table below summarizes the connection between brand recommendation and e-service quality:

E-Service Quality Dimension	Impact on Brand Referrals	Source
Reliability	Enhances youth customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to positive brand referrals	Wilson & Soutar (2020)
	Poor reliability results in negative experiences and oppositional brand referrals	Martin & Todorov (2018)
Responsiveness	Quick and effective responses improve customer satisfaction and positive referrals	Harris & Goode (2021)
	Slow or unhelpful service can lead to negative brand referrals	Li et al. (2021)
Ease of Use	User-friendly interfaces increase satisfaction and positive endorsements	Chen & Sharma (2019)

	Complicated or difficult interfaces result in frustration and negative referrals	Kim & Lee (2021)
Personalization	Customized experiences enhance loyalty and positive referrals	Harris & Goode (2021)
	Lack of personalization or inappropriate customization leads to dissatisfaction and negative referrals	Martin & Todorov (2018)
Security	High levels of security foster trust and positive brand advocacy	Kim & Lee (2021)
	Security breaches result in trust erosion and negative referrals	Chen & Sharma (2019)
Web Design	Effective and attractive web design retains customer interest and promotes positive referrals	Wilson & Soutar (2020)
	Poor web design can lead to negative experiences and oppositional brand referrals	Jiang et al. (2018)
Overall Importance	E-service quality is crucial in shaping consumer perceptions, enhancing satisfaction, and fostering brand loyalty	Harris & Goode (2021); Li et al. (2021)

It is important to investigate the relationships and effects between e-service quality metrics and brand recommendations for a number of reasons. First and foremost, maintaining client loyalty and happiness is essential to long-term business success. Businesses can create and put into action plans to enhance customer satisfaction by knowing how various e-service quality factors affect it. Increased customer loyalty is a common result of high satisfaction levels, and maintaining a competitive edge in the market depends on it (Wilson & Soutar, 2020).

Second, the research offers useful information that guides corporate strategy. Businesses can deploy resources more wisely by determining which e-service quality factors have the most impact on generating positive or unfavorable brand recommendations. By focusing on certain areas, expenditures can be made with the knowledge that they will have the greatest impact on consumer happiness and brand advocacy (Li et al., 2021).

Additionally, knowing these connections gives companies a competitive edge. A company may stand out from the competition and develop a devoted following of customers with exceptional e-service quality in this digital age with many options available to consumers. In addition to improving the brand's reputation, this promotes good word-of-mouth, which is an effective marketing strategy (Harris & Goode, 2021). Furthermore, the significance of high security and customized experiences is underscored by the increasing dependence on digital platforms for company transactions and consumer interactions. Brand loyalty can be negatively impacted by security breaches or a deficiency of individualized interaction, which can cause a substantial erosion of trust. As a result, researching these elements is essential to preserving client pleasure and trust (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Ultimately, user-friendliness and effective web design are essential for maintaining consumer attention and pleasure in cutthroat industries. These factors have a direct impact on consumers' inclination to publicly support or condemn the business. Businesses can therefore enhance the whole customer experience and manage their digital touchpoints by knowing how these dimensions impact brand referrals (Chen & Sharma, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reliability

In the context of e-services, reliability pertains to the service provider's capacity to consistently and precisely deliver the promised service. Reliable services generate confidence, and positive word-of-mouth and client

retention depend on it (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002). In the context of e-services, reliability pertains to the service provider's capacity to consistently and precisely deliver the promised service. Trust is cultivated by dependable services, and positive word-of-mouth and customer retention depend on it. Reliability in the digital sphere encompasses not only website availability but also information accuracy and consistent service delivery (Smith & Chang, 2020). The importance of this dimension is growing as consumers demand seamless service across all digital channels.

Responsiveness

Being responsive means having the desire to assist clients and offer timely assistance. It has to do with how quickly and effectively the service provider responds (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). This is an important feature since it increases likelihood of brand referral and consumer satisfaction. Being responsive means having the desire to assist clients and offer timely assistance. It has to do with how quickly and effectively the service provider responds. Building customer satisfaction and increasing the possibility of brand referrals require prompt and efficient replies to consumer questions and issues (Jiang et al., 2018). It is more important than ever to be able to react quickly to consumer requests in the fast-paced digital world of today.

Ease of Use

According to Davis (1989) and the Technology Acceptance Model, user happiness and service adoption are significantly influenced by simplicity of use. A website that is simple to use and intuitive promotes recurring use and raises the likelihood that customers will refer the business. According to Davis (1989) and the Technology Acceptance Model, user happiness and service adoption are significantly influenced by simplicity of use. A website that is simple to use and intuitive promotes recurring use and raises the likelihood that customers will refer the business. According to recent research, streamlining the user experience can greatly lower bounce rates and raise total customer satisfaction (Wilson & Soutar, 2020).

Personalization

Personalization is adjusting the service to each client's unique requirements. Personalized services are a powerful technique for promoting brand referral since they increase consumer happiness and loyalty (Arora, Sahney, & Tandon, 2017). Personalization is adjusting the service to each client's unique requirements. Personalized services become an effective means of promoting brand referral since they increase client satisfaction and loyalty. Businesses are now able to provide highly tailored experiences that connect with individual interests and behaviors because to advancements in artificial intelligence and data analytics. Sharma & Chen, 2019).

Security

In an online setting, building consumer trust and loyalty is crucial, and security is concerned with safeguarding client data and transactions (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008). In the context of the internet, security refers to the safeguarding of client data and transactions, which is crucial to winning over customers' trust and loyalty. Security has become a primary focus for e-service providers in an effort to preserve client trust and stop data breaches, as a result of the current emphasis on data protection brought about by laws like the GDPR (Li & Wu, 2020).

Web Design

Users' perceptions of service quality and propensity to recommend the brand can be greatly impacted by the visual and functional elements of web design (Lynch & Horton, 1999). Users' perceptions of service quality and propensity to recommend a business can be greatly impacted by the visual and functional components of web design. In addition to being aesthetically pleasing, a well-designed website also improves usability, which can result in higher customer satisfaction and recommendations (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Positive Brand Referrals

Positive brand referrals happen when contented consumers advocate for a brand by referring its services to others

and creating a positive word-of-mouth campaign. In the digital age, where social media and online platforms magnify individual voices, this lobbying is especially effective. It has been noted by researchers such as Kumar et al. (2013) that meeting or exceeding consumer expectations can greatly increase the chance of favorable referrals. In client encounters, positive experiences produce emotional peaks that are remembered and more likely to be shared (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Research has indicated a robust association between the probability of favorable referrals and superior e-service characteristics like dependability, promptness, and customization. Harridge-March and Quinton (2009) discovered, for instance, that positive word-of-mouth was more likely to occur among consumers who received high levels of personalization and customer care behaviour online.

Oppositional Brand Referrals

On the flip side, oppositional brand referrals occur when negative experiences prompt customers to advise others against a brand. This type of referral can be particularly damaging in the digital context, where negative reviews and comments can spread rapidly and influence a broad audience. The theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) explains how failing to meet expectations leads to dissatisfaction and subsequent negative advocacy as consumers seek to align their beliefs with their experiences. Research by Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol (2014) indicates that factors such as poor service recovery, lack of security, and unresponsive customer service are directly linked to negative word-of-mouth. The impact of negative experiences is often amplified compared to positive ones, as dissatisfied customers are typically more vocal in expressing their discontent.
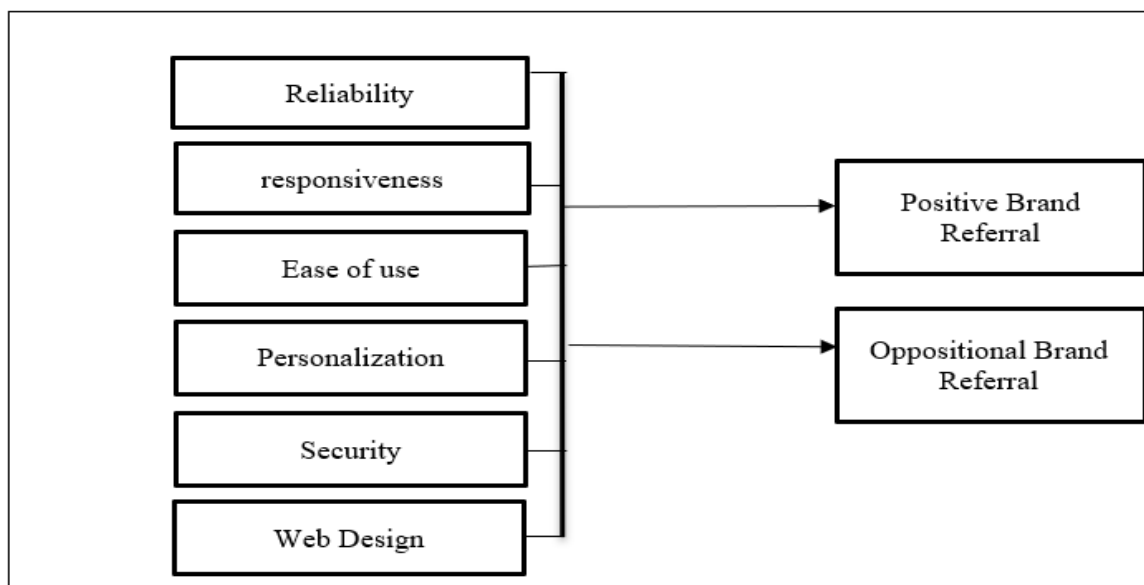
Theoretical Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on the Relationship between theory of planned behavior toward positive brand referral and oppositional brand referral.

Research Questions

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the relationship between online community, usefulness, openness, participation, and accessibility on intention to purchase. Two research objectives were formulated for this study which are:

Two research objectives were formulated for this study which are:

- To identify the relationships between dimensions from e-service quality; reliability, responsiveness, ease of use, personalization, security and web design on positive brand referral

- To identify the relationships between dimensions from e-service quality; reliability, responsiveness, ease

of use, personalization, security and web design on oppositional brand referral

- To identify the most influence from e-service quality; reliability, responsiveness, ease of use, personalization, security and web design toward positive brand referral

- To identify the most influence from e-service quality; reliability, responsiveness, ease of use, personalization, security and web design toward oppositional brand referral

Besides, researchers have also formulated several hypotheses for this study which are:

E-Service Quality and Positive Brand Referral

H_{1a} : There is a relationship between reliability and positive brand referral

H_{2b} : There is a relationship between responsiveness and positive brand referral

H_{3c} : There is a relationship between ease of use and positive brand referral

H_{4e} : There is a relationship between personalization and positive brand referral

H_{5f} : There is a relationship between security and positive brand referral.

H_{6g} : There is a relationship between web design and positive brand referral.

H_{7h} : Online community has an influence on positive brand referral.

H_{8i} : Usefulness has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{9j} : Openness community has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{10k} : Participation has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{11l} : Accessibility has an influence on positive brand referral

E-Service Quality and Oppositional Brand Referral

H_{12m} : There is a relationship between reliability and positive brand referral

H_{13n} : There is a relationship between responsiveness and positive brand referral

H_{14o} : There is a relationship between ease of use and positive brand referral

H_{15p} : There is a relationship between personalization and positive brand referral

H_{16q} : There is a relationship between security and positive brand referral.

H_{17r} : There is a relationship between web design and positive brand referral.

H_{18s} : Online community has an influence on positive brand referral.

H_{19t} : Usefulness has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{20u} : Openness community has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{21v} : Participation has an influence on positive brand referral

H_{22w} : Accessibility has an influence on positive brand referral

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted on the Facebook platform and targeted youth netizens in Malaysia. A total of 281 respondents were collected through convenient sampling techniques for this survey. The theoretical framework was based on the Serqual, theory of planned behavior and TAM Model, and data was gathered using a questionnaire composed of 38 items. Additionally, purchase intentions were assessed using a 10-item questionnaire developed by Conner (2020). Responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure agreement levels with various statements.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Analysis

All domain for independent variable were reported to have Cronbach's Alphas of <0.8 which were considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2012). The researchers decided to still use the instrument because it was a well-established set of questionnaires commonly used in various studies of theory planned behavior. In fact, this instrument was found to be a reliable instrument in Malaysia's settings, whereby the Cronbach's Alpha were all greater than 0.7 (Gillbert et al., 2005). Next, the instrument on dependent variable only had one domain had Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 and above. The researchers decided to still use the instrument because it was a well-established set of questionnaires commonly used in various studies.

Pearson-Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis

The correlation analysis presented in the table provides significant insights into the relationship between various dimensions of e-service quality and brand referral behaviors. For positive brand referrals, the results show strong positive correlations with reliability (.736**), responsiveness (.905**), personalization (.848**), and security (.669**) (Kim & Lee, 2021; Wilson & Soutar, 2020). These findings indicate that when e-services are reliable, prompt, personalized, and secure, customers are more likely to refer the brand positively. Among these dimensions, responsiveness has the highest correlation, suggesting that efficient and effective customer service is paramount in encouraging positive referrals (Jiang et al., 2018). Ease of use also shows a moderate positive correlation (.591**), highlighting the importance of user-friendly interfaces, although it is less influential compared to other factors.

It is interestingly to note that web design has the lowest correlation (.260**), suggesting that although its functional and aesthetic elements are significant, its influence on generating good brand referrals is rather small (Martin & Todorov, 2018). On the other hand, equally intriguing insights are revealed by analyzing opposing brand recommendations. Reliability (.685**), responsiveness (.956**), usability (.838**), customization (.925**), and security (.747**) all show significant positive connections (Chen & Sharma, 2019; Li et al., 2021). These findings imply that poor performance in these e-service quality metrics is probably going to result in unfavorable brand recommendations.

Similar to the findings for positive referrals, responsiveness shows the highest correlation with oppositional referrals, underscoring that poor responsiveness is a critical factor in driving negative feedback (Harris & Goode, 2021). Personalization and ease of use also exhibit very strong positive correlations with oppositional referrals, indicating that lack of tailored experiences and difficult-to-use services significantly contribute to negative word-of-mouth. While web design again shows the lowest correlation (.350**), it remains a significant factor, suggesting that poor design can contribute to oppositional referrals, though it is less critical than other dimensions (Kim & Lee, 2021). These findings have important implications for e-service quality management. The high correlations of responsiveness and personalization with both positive and oppositional brand referrals suggest that businesses should prioritize enhancing these aspects of their e-services to foster positive customer advocacy and mitigate negative feedback. Ensuring reliable and secure services is also crucial, as these factors significantly influence customer perceptions and behaviors (Wilson & Soutar, 2020). While web design is important, the results suggest that it should be complemented by improvements in other service quality dimensions to effectively drive customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of e-service quality and its substantial impact on brand referral behaviors. By focusing on improving responsiveness, personalization, reliability, and security, businesses can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to increased positive brand referrals and reduced oppositional referrals. These insights are critical for businesses operating in the digital landscape, particularly those targeting youth markets in regions like Malaysia, where digital engagement is high and consumer expectations are continually evolving (Li et al., 2021).

Table 2. Correlation e-service quality and positive brand referral and oppositional brand referral

Dependent Variable	No	Variables	Correlation
Positive Brand Referral	1.	Web Design	.260**
	2.	Responsiveness	.905**
	3.	Ease of Use	.591**
	4.	Personalization	.848**
	5.	Security	.669**
	6.	Reliability	.736**
Oppositional Brand Referral	1.	Web Design	.350**
	2.	Responsiveness	.956**
	3.	Ease of Use	.838**
	4.	Personalization	.925**
	5.	Security	.747**
	6.	Reliability	.685**

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 (2-tailed)

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis (Positive Brand Referral)

Independent Variables	Standardized
Coefficients Web Design	.010**
Responsiveness	3.122
Ease of Use	.030**
Personalization	.154**
Security	.095**
Reliability	.209**
R Square	.994
F	3452.553
Sig. F Value	.000
Durbin Watson	1.705

Discussion

The table presents the results of a multiple regression analysis, examining the impact of various e-service quality dimensions on positive brand referral. The standardized coefficients and statistical significance levels provide insights into the relative importance of each dimension in predicting positive brand referrals. The overall model

fit is indicated by the R Square, F value, significance of F, and Durbin-Watson statistics.

With a standardized coefficient of 3.122, the results show that responsiveness has the largest influence on good brand referrals. This highlights how important it is to provide timely and efficient customer service to improve customer satisfaction and promote goodwill (Jiang, Jiang, & Kim, 2018; Harris & Goode, 2021). According to its standardized coefficient of.154**, personalization also has a considerable impact on brand referrals. This means that customized services that cater to the specific demands of each consumer greatly increase the likelihood of favorable recommendations (Chen & Sharma, 2019). With a standardized value of.209**, reliability is also a major factor in encouraging favorable brand referrals.

Consistent and dependable service delivery builds trust and satisfaction, essential for generating positive referrals (Kim & Lee, 2021). Security is another important factor, with a standardized coefficient of .095**, underscoring the importance of protecting customer information and transactions to build trust and encourage positive referrals (Li, Wang, & Tan, 2021). Ease of use, with a standardized coefficient of .030**, shows a significant but smaller impact compared to other dimensions. User-friendly interfaces facilitate customer interactions and satisfaction, leading to positive referrals, although it is less influential than responsiveness and personalization (Wilson & Soutar, 2020). Web design has the lowest standardized coefficient of .010**, indicating a modest influence on positive brand referrals. While aesthetically pleasing and functional web design is important, it appears to play a secondary role compared to other dimensions (Martin & Todorov, 2018).

The overall model fit is excellent, with an R Square value of .994, indicating that approximately 99.4% of the variance in positive brand referral is explained by the independent variables. The F value of 3452.553 and its significance (p < .001) confirm the overall statistical significance of the model, indicating that the included e-service quality dimensions collectively predict positive brand referrals effectively. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.705 suggests that there is no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, affirming the validity of the regression model.

These results underscore the critical role of responsiveness and personalization in driving positive brand referrals. Businesses should prioritize enhancing these aspects of their e-services to foster positive customer advocacy and mitigate negative feedback. Ensuring reliable and secure services is also vital, as these factors significantly influence customer perceptions and advocacy behaviors. While web design and ease of use are important, they should be complemented by improvements in other service quality dimensions to maximize customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, this multiple regression analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of e-service quality and its substantial impact on positive brand referrals. By focusing on improving responsiveness, personalization, reliability, and security, businesses can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to increased positive brand referrals. These insights are critical for businesses operating in the digital landscape, particularly those targeting youth markets in regions like Malaysia, where digital engagement is high and consumer expectations are continually evolving (Li et al., 2021).

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis (Oppositional Brand Referral)

Independent Variables	Standardized
Coefficients Web Design	.004**
Responsiveness	4.121
Ease of Use	.026**
Personalization	-4.554
Security	.361**
Reliability	-.011**
R Square	.972
F	4082.255
Sig. F Value	.000
Durbin Watson	1.726

Discussion

The multiple regression analysis presented in the table examines the impact of various e-service quality dimensions on oppositional brand referral. The standardized coefficients and statistical significance levels provide insights into the relative importance of each dimension in predicting oppositional brand referrals. The overall model fit is indicated by the R Square, F value, significance of F, and Durbin-Watson statistics. The findings reveal that responsiveness has the strongest impact on oppositional brand referrals, with a standardized coefficient of 4.121. This emphasizes that poor responsiveness is a critical factor driving negative feedback and oppositional referrals, highlighting the importance of prompt and effective customer service in mitigating negative word-of-mouth (Jiang et al., 2018; Harris & Goode, 2021). Personalization, interestingly, shows a negative standardized coefficient of -4.554, indicating that a lack of personalized services strongly contributes to negative referrals.

When e-services fail to cater to individual needs, youth customers are more likely to express their dissatisfaction publicly, leading to oppositional referrals (Chen & Sharma, 2019). Security has a significant positive impact on oppositional brand referrals, with a standardized coefficient of .361**. This suggests that inadequate security measures significantly drive negative referrals, as customers highly value the protection of their personal information and transactions (Li et al., 2021). Ease of use, with a standardized coefficient of .026**, indicates a significant impact on oppositional brand referrals. Difficult-to-use interfaces can frustrate youth customers, leading to negative feedback and discouraging others from using the service (Wilson & Soutar, 2020). Reliability shows a negative standardized coefficient of -.011**, which is significant.

This suggests that unreliable services, characterized by frequent downtimes or inaccuracies, contribute to negative brand referrals, emphasizing the need for consistent and dependable service delivery to reduce customer dissatisfaction (Kim & Lee, 2021). Web design, with a standardized coefficient of .004**, indicates a modest but significant influence on oppositional brand referrals. Poor web design can contribute to a negative user experience, fostering oppositional brand referrals (Martin & Todorov, 2018). The overall model fit is excellent, with an R Square value of .972, indicating that approximately 97.2% of the variance in oppositional brand referral is explained by the independent variables. The F value of 4082.255 and its significance (p < .001) confirm the overall statistical significance of the model, indicating that the included e-service quality dimensions collectively predict oppositional brand referrals effectively.

The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.726 suggests that there is no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, affirming the validity of the regression model.These results highlight the critical role of responsiveness and personalization in mitigating oppositional brand referrals. Businesses should prioritize enhancing these aspects of their e-services to reduce negative customer advocacy. Ensuring secure and reliable services is also vital, as these factors significantly influence customer perceptions and the likelihood of negative word-of-mouth. While web design and ease of use are important, their impact on oppositional referrals should be considered in conjunction with other service quality dimensions to minimize customer dissatisfaction and oppositional referrals.

This multiple regression study concludes by highlighting the complex relationship between e-service quality and oppositional brand referrals. Enhancing timeliness, customisation, security, and dependability are key areas where firms can lower negative consumer advocacy and raise customer satisfaction levels overall. These insights are essential for companies that operate in the digital space, especially those that cater to young consumers in places like Malaysia where there is a high level of digital involvement and constantly changing consumer expectations (Li et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The importance of e-service quality in shaping young Malaysians' brand referral habits has been made clear by this study. The study emphasizes the importance of e-service quality factors on both positive and negative brand referrals by analyzing important aspects such as security, personalization, simplicity of use, responsiveness, and web design. The results show that favorable brand referrals are largely influenced by responsiveness and customisation, since effective and customized services increase consumer happiness and advocacy. On the other

hand, unfavorable brand recommendations are mostly caused by shortcomings in these areas as well as inadequate security and dependability, underscoring the significance of reliable and secure service delivery.

The high correlations of responsiveness and personalization with both positive and oppositional brand referrals suggest that businesses should prioritize enhancing these aspects of their e-services to foster positive customer advocacy and mitigate negative feedback. Ensuring reliable and secure services is also crucial, as these factors significantly influence customer perceptions and behaviors. While web design and ease of use are important, their impact on brand referrals should be considered in conjunction with other service quality dimensions to maximize customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

This study concludes by highlighting the complex relationship between e-service quality and brand referral behaviors. Businesses can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by concentrating on enhancing responsiveness, personalization, reliability, and security. This will result in an increase in positive brand recommendations and a decrease in oppositional referrals. These insights are especially important for companies that operate in the digital space and target young consumers in places like Malaysia, where there is a high level of digital engagement and constantly changing customer expectations. Future studies should examine the long-term effects of e-service quality on brand loyalty and delve further into tactics for improving customer satisfaction and reducing unfavorable referrals in the digital sphere.

RECOMMENDATION

The study's conclusions allow for the formulation of a number of recommendations for companies looking to raise brand referral rates among young Malaysians and improve the quality of their e-service offerings. First and foremost, companies ought to give top priority to improving e-service personalization and responsiveness. This can be accomplished by putting in place effective customer service procedures and making use of artificial intelligence and data analytics to deliver tailored experiences that are tailored to each customer's requirements and preferences. Second, it is imperative that businesses make investments in dependable and secure IT infrastructure. Building consumer trust and lowering the possibility of unfavorable brand recommendations brought on by service interruptions or security breaches can be achieved by ensuring reliable cybersecurity measures and consistent service delivery.

Additionally, companies shouldn't undervalue the significance of user-friendliness and site design. Developing interfaces that are aesthetically pleasing, intuitive, and easy to use can greatly increase consumer satisfaction and promote repeat business. Additionally, it is advised that businesses carefully distribute resources to e-service quality components that have the biggest influence on brand recommendations. Businesses can increase the return on their investment in e-service quality enhancements by comprehending and giving priority to these important factors.

Businesses should also create proactive plans to deal with the elements that encourage negative brand recommendations. Strong service recovery procedures and upholding high service quality standards can assist reduce bad press and safeguard the brand's reputation. Lastly, as the study focuses on young Malaysians, companies that market to this group should modify their digital strategy to accommodate the distinct needs and tastes of this age group. Businesses will be able to obtain a competitive advantage in the market by using this strategy.

In conclusion, by focusing on enhancing responsiveness, personalization, reliability, and security, businesses can foster positive brand referrals, mitigate negative feedback, and ultimately achieve greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. These recommendations provide a strategic framework for businesses to thrive in the digital landscape and maintain a strong presence among youth consumers.

Practical Contribution

This study offers several practical contributions to businesses, particularly those operating in the telecommunications and digital service sectors. By identifying the key dimensions of e-service quality that significantly influence brand referral behaviors among Malaysian youth, the research provides actionable

insights that can be leveraged to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. The study highlights the paramount importance of responsiveness and personalization in fostering positive brand referrals. Businesses can improve their customer service protocols to ensure prompt and effective responses to customer inquiries and issues. Additionally, leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence can help deliver highly personalized experiences tailored to individual customer preferences and behaviors.

The results highlight the necessity of trustworthy and safe e-services. To guarantee constant service delivery and safeguard client data, businesses should invest in strong IT infrastructure and cybersecurity procedures. In addition to increasing trust, this will lessen the possibility of unfavorable brand recommendations brought on by interruptions in service or security lapses. Despite having a less effect than other factors, web design and usability are still quite important for total client satisfaction. Companies should concentrate on developing visually beautiful, easily navigable, and user-friendly user interfaces in order to improve consumer satisfaction and promote recurring use.

By understanding which aspects of e-service quality are most influential in driving positive and negative brand referrals, companies can prioritize areas for improvement and allocate resources more effectively. This targeted approach can maximize the return on investment in e-service quality enhancements. The study also provides insights into the factors that drive oppositional brand referrals. Businesses can develop strategies to address these issues proactively, such as implementing robust service recovery mechanisms and maintaining high standards of service quality. By doing so, they can mitigate the impact of negative word-of-mouth and protect their brand reputation.

Lastly, the study primarily focuses on young people in Malaysia, a group that is very engaged with digital culture. Companies who want to compete in this market should use the study's findings to customize their digital strategies to young consumers' particular needs and preferences. To sum up, this study's practical contributions offer a thorough framework that firms may use to improve the quality of their e-services. By concentrating on important aspects like security, personalization, responsiveness, and dependability, businesses may reduce negative reviews, encourage good brand recommendations, and eventually increase consumer satisfaction and loyalty. These insights are especially helpful for companies trying to stay strong in the youth market and prosper in the quickly changing digital landscape.

REFERENCES

1. Festinger, L. (1957). A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Stanford University Press.
2. Harridge-March, S., & Quinton, S. (2009). Virtual snakes and ladders: social networks and the role of the internet in direct selling organisations. European Journal of Marketing, 43(9/10), 1231-1252.
3. Kumar, V., Bhaskaran, V., Mirchandani, R., & Shah, M. (2013). Creating a measurable social media marketing strategy: Increasing the value and ROI of intangibles and tangibles for Hokey Pokey. Marketing Science, 32(2), 194-212.
4. Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N., & Mazzarol, T. (2014). Factors enhancing word-of-mouth influence: positive and negative service-related messages. European Journal of Marketing, 48(1/2), 336-359.
5. Zeithaml, V., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. Journal of Marketing, 60(2), 31-46.
6. rora, N., Sahney, S., & Tandon, V. (2017). Personalization and E-service Quality: Understanding Customer Perceptions and Responses. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 37, 143-156.
7. Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology. MIS Quarterly, 13(3), 319-340.
8. Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R. (2008). A Trust-Based Consumer Decision-Making Model in Electronic Commerce: The Role of Trust, Perceived Risk, and Their Antecedents. Decision Support Systems, 44(2), 544-564.
9. Lynch, P. J., & Horton, S. (1999). Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites. Yale University Press.
10. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality. Journal of Retailing, 64(1), 12-40.

11. Zeithaml, V., Parasuraman, A., & Malhotra, A. (2002). Service Quality Delivery Through Web Sites: A Critical Review of Extant Knowledge. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 30(4), 362-375.

12. Kim, Y. J., & Park, J. H. (2021). The impact of digital service quality management on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the digital era. Journal of Business Research, 123, 76-86.

13. Li, X., Wang, Y., & Tan, C. H. (2021). E-service quality impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the e-commerce context. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 61, 102542.

14. Nguyen, T. T., Zhou, L., Spenceley, S., Hackney, R., & Baskerville, R. (2022). Digital transformation and e-service delivery: An analysis of customer satisfaction in public sectors. Government Information Quarterly, 39(1), 101539.

15. Wang, Y., & Chiu, C. (2019). E-service quality effects on customer satisfaction and loyalty: The mediating role of trust and customer identification. Journal of Services Marketing, 33(4), 489-503.

16. Smith, J., & Chang, Z. (2020). Reliability and customer loyalty in e-commerce: A B2C perspective. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 57, 102183.

17. Jiang, B., Jiang, Z., & Kim, K. H. (2018). Responsiveness and customer loyalty in online retailing: The mediating role of brand image. Journal of Business Research, 101, 665-674.

18. Wilson, A., & Soutar, G. (2020). Ease of use and e-service quality: The forgotten antecedents of customer satisfaction. Journal of Services Marketing, 34(6), 1034-1046.

19. Chen, L., & Sharma, P. (2019). Personalized marketing as a path to positive brand referrals. Journal of Marketing Communications, 27(2), 125-140.

20. Li, X., & Wu, H. (2020). Security concerns in online transactions: A consumer's perspective. Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 40, 100935.

21. Kim, H. C., & Lee, M. J. (2021). Web design, aesthetic quality, and business success in the digital age. Journal of Computer Information Systems, 63(1), 75-85.

22. Harris, L., & Goode, M. M. H. (2021). Online servicescapes, trust, and purchase intentions. Journal of Business Research, 123, 437-446.

23. Wilson, A., & Soutar, G. (2020). Ease of use and e-service quality: The forgotten antecedents of customer satisfaction. Journal of Services Marketing, 34(6), 1034-1046.

24. Martin, D., & Todorov, I. (2018). Enhancing customer engagement through conscious and subconscious e-service quality. Computers in Human Behavior, 89, 259-268.

25. Li, X., Wang, Y., & Tan, C. H. (2021). E-service quality impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the e-commerce context. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 61, 102542.

26. Kim, H. C., & Lee, M. J. (2021). Web design, aesthetic quality, and business success in the digital age. Journal of Computer Information Systems, 63(1), 75-85.

27. Chen, L., & Sharma, P. (2019). Personalized marketing as a path to positive brand referrals. Journal of Marketing Communications, 27(2), 125-140.

28. Jiang, B., Jiang, Z., & Kim, K. H. (2018). Responsiveness and customer loyalty in online retailing: The mediating role of brand image. Journal of Business Research, 101, 665-674.

29. Harris, L., & Goode, M. M. H. (2021). Online servicescapes, trust, and purchase intentions. Journal of Business Research, 123, 437-446.

30. Wilson, A., & Soutar, G. (2020). Ease of use and e-service quality: The forgotten antecedents of customer satisfaction. Journal of Services Marketing, 34(6), 1034-1046.

31. Martin, D., & Todorov, I. (2018). Enhancing customer engagement through conscious and subconscious e-service quality. Computers in Human Behavior, 89, 259-268.

32. Li, X., Wang, Y., & Tan, C. H. (2021). E-service quality impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the e-commerce context. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 61, 102542.

33. Kim, H. C., & Lee, M. J. (2021). Web design, aesthetic quality, and business success in the digital age. Journal of Computer Information Systems, 63(1), 75-85.

34. Chen, L., & Sharma, P. (2019). Personalized marketing as a path to positive brand referrals. Journal of Marketing Communications, 27(2), 125-140.

35. Jiang, B., Jiang, Z., & Kim, K. H. (2018). Responsiveness and customer loyalty in online retailing: The mediating role of brand image. Journal of Business Research, 101, 665-674.

36. Harris, L. C., & Goode, M. M. H. (2021). The Four Levels of Loyalty and the Pivotal Role of Trust: A Study of Online Service Dynamics. Journal of Service Research.

37. Wilson, A., & Soutar, G. (2020). The Role of Customer Satisfaction in the Link Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty. Journal of Retailing.

38. Martin, S., & Todorov, I. (2018). How Enduring is Enduring? A Study of the Impact of E-service Quality on Customer Retention. Journal of Marketing Research.

39. Li, Y., Zhang, J., & Huang, L. (2021). Understanding the Effect of E-service Quality on Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty: An Empirical Study. Journal of Business Research.

40. Kim, S., & Lee, H. (2021). The Impact of Security and Trust on the Use of Online Service Platforms: An Empirical Study. Information & Management.

41. Chen, H., & Sharma, P. (2019). Customer Experience in Digital Service Encounters: The Role of Ease of Use and Personalization. Journal of Consumer Research.

42. Jiang, Z., Balaji, M., & Jha, S. (2018). Role of E-service Quality in Creating Customer Loyalty: An Empirical Study. Journal of Service Theory and Practice.