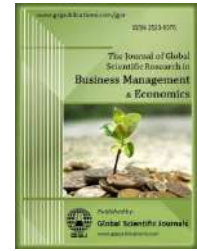




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The Effect of Service Quality on International Postgraduates Students' Loyalty Mediated by Positive Emotion Satisfaction towards Malaysian Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the effect of higher education performance of service quality on customer loyalty mediator by positive emotional satisfaction among international postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities. The carefully chosen elements were service quality, positive emotion satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The theoretical framework in this study was based on the Social Exchange Theory. A quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was utilised as the main research design. The data was collected from international postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities. A survey questionnaire was developed and verified for its construct validity based on the judgments of 2 experts. A pilot test was conducted to investigate the questionnaire reliability involving 50 respondents selected from Malaysian public universities. Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted on 100 respondents in Malaysian public universities to verify the research variables that could be used in the actual study. The actual survey questionnaire was distributed to 380 respondents, and the data were analysed using SEM to determine the relationship between the variables. The research results indicated that service quality has a significant and positive effect on positive emotional satisfaction. The positive significant relation was ($B=0.218, p< 0.05$). The research results indicated no effect of service quality on customer loyalty. Therefore, H3 was rejected ($p=0.142$). Moreover, positive emotional satisfaction mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. The positive significant relation was ($B=0.047, p< 0.05$). The main implication of the study is that Malaysian public universities should focus on emotional satisfaction to increase the loyalty of the customers.

1. Introduction

Globally, the importance of service marketing commerce is known to be dominating the worldwide market by offering more than 70% of employment in the public and private fields (Jager & Jan, 2015). Conceivably, this changes the

marketing theory and practice from the manufacturing or goods marketing to the marketing of services (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). Current studies suggest that in the context of service, the strategies of marketing is crucial as

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the services are viewed as intangible, fragile, and less consistent (de Jager & Jan, 2015; Schlesinger et al., 2021). In addition, the consumption and the service production involve the customers and companies than for manufactured products (Cronin & Taylor, 1994).

In today's competitive business environment, delivering high-quality services to customers has become increasingly important for firms to achieve and maintain a competitive edge. Service quality is defined as the degree to which the service provided meets or exceeds customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It has been widely acknowledged that service quality is a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Caruana, 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence customer satisfaction and loyalty has become a crucial area of research for both academics and practitioners.

However, one of the theoretical framework that has been widely used to study customer satisfaction and loyalty is the social exchange theory (SET). SET posits that individuals engage in relationships with others based on a perceived balance of rewards and costs (Blau, 1964). In the context of service encounters, customers expect to receive certain benefits (e.g., product quality, responsiveness) from the service provider, and in return, they are willing to provide something of value (e.g., loyalty, repeat purchases). The perceived balance of rewards and costs, in turn, shapes customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Another key factor that has been shown to influence customer satisfaction and loyalty is emotional satisfaction. Emotional satisfaction refers to the emotional response that customers experience as a result of using a particular service (Hassan and Ahmed, 2012). Positive emotional satisfaction, in particular, has been found to increase customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Lam and Zhang, 2013). Given the importance of emotional satisfaction in shaping customer behavior, it is critical to understand how service quality and emotional satisfaction are related and how they jointly influence customer loyalty.

The increasing importance of the international student market in higher education. In recent years, Malaysian public universities have seen a significant increase in the number of international postgraduate students. As such, it has become increasingly important for these universities to understand the factors that contribute to international postgraduate students' loyalty towards their institution. Service quality and positive emotional satisfaction have been identified as two such factors.

Previous research has established the significant effect of service quality on customer loyalty across various industries, including higher education. Positive emotional satisfaction has also been found to play a mediating role in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. However, there is a lack of research on the effect of service quality and positive emotional satisfaction on international postgraduate students' loyalty towards Malaysian public universities.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by examining the effect of service quality on international postgraduate students' loyalty mediated by positive emotional satisfaction towards Malaysian public universities. The findings of this study can help Malaysian public universities improve their service quality and enhance international postgraduate students' loyalty towards their institution, which is crucial for sustaining and growing the international student market.

Problem Statement

In recent years, the higher education sector in Malaysia has become increasingly competitive, with more universities competing for a limited number of students. As a result, it has become imperative for universities to focus on improving the quality of their services in order to attract and retain students. Previous studies have shown that service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty are crucial factors in the higher education sector, but there is still a gap in the literature regarding the role of positive emotions in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, particularly in the context of Malaysian public universities. Therefore, the problem statement for this study is:

What is the role of positive emotions in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in Malaysian public universities?

Research Gap

While previous studies have examined the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the higher education sector, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the role of positive emotions in this relationship, particularly in the context of Malaysian public universities. By exploring the role of positive emotions in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, this study will contribute to the existing literature on service quality and customer loyalty in the higher education sector. Furthermore, this study will provide insights into the specific factors that contribute to customer loyalty in Malaysian public universities, which can be used by university administrators and policymakers to improve the quality of services and attract and retain more students.

Theoretical Gap

Based on the literature review and theoretical background, there appears to be a gap in the understanding of the mediating role of positive emotion satisfaction on the relationship between service quality factors and customer loyalty in Malaysian public universities. Although previous studies have explored the direct relationship between service quality factors and customer loyalty, there is a lack of research on the role of positive emotion satisfaction as a mediator in this relationship.

Furthermore, most of the existing studies have been conducted in Western countries, with limited research conducted in the Malaysian context. Thus, there is a need to investigate the applicability of social exchange theory in the Malaysian context and explore how positive emotion satisfaction affects the relationship between service quality factors and customer loyalty.

Overall, the theoretical gap in this study is the lack of research on the mediating role of positive emotion satisfaction in the relationship between service quality factors and customer loyalty in

Malaysian public universities, which this study aims to address

2. The Conceptual Framework

In the present study, the first part of the independent variable for this conceptual framework is service quality, which include of academic, non-academic, program issue, access, reputation, e-service quality. The service quality was hypothesized to be associated with positive emotion's satisfaction and loyalty. Concurrently, it is suggested that positive emotion may influence customer loyalty and a variable that mediates the connection between the quality of service and loyalty of the customer. The dependent variable of this study is the customer loyalty. Below is the explanation for the association between independent variable, mediate variable and dependent variable.

According to Dropulić et al. (2021), the positive emotion of satisfaction can reduce the cost of marketing and increasing the loyalty of the customers towards organisations. For example, the influence of academic issue (Yuan et al., 2016; Santos & Ruiz-esteban, 2020), non-academic (Chong & Ahmed, 2015; McLeay et al., 2017; Moslehpour et al., 2020), program issue (Salmuni et al., 2016 ;Osman and Ashraf 2019), access (McLeay et al., 2017) , reputation (Salmuni et al., 2016) , e-service quality (Um & Ph, 2021; Daud et al., 2020) on the satisfaction of the customer, and eventually, the loyalty of the customer was described by empirically by the previous studies.

Nevertheless, empirical proof can also happen due to the insignificant connection between service quality and the positive satisfaction of the customer (Narang, 2012; Ushantha & Kumara, 2016; Md et al., 2017) and customer loyalty (Subrahmanyam, 2017; Chandra et al., 2018).

These mixtures of findings recommend the need to examine the viable role of a contingent variable between the predictor and the criterion variables. Thus, positive emotion satisfaction may be sufficient to guarantee customer loyalty in Malaysian public universities as it relies on the emotion of international postgraduate satisfaction, which requires empirical proof (Dropulić et al., 2021). In other words, positive

emotional satisfaction is hypothesized to lessen the impact of the quality of service on the loyalty

of the customer in the Malaysian public universities.

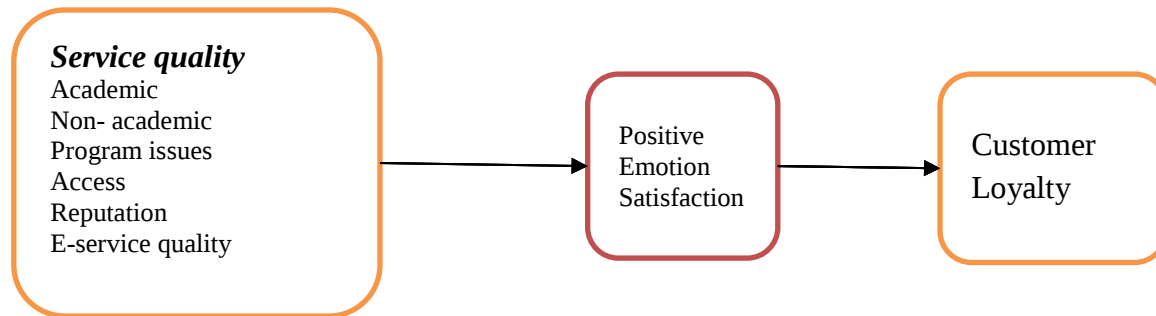


Figure: Conceptual Framework of study

2.1 Underpinning Theory (SET)

The social exchange theory comes from the traditional theories of social behaviour, which say that any interaction between two people that involves an exchange of goods and services is social behaviour (Press, 2013). Major contributions to the creation of SET were made by sociologists and psychologists, as documented by (Cook & Rice, 2006). The essential presumption of SET is that individuals get into and continue to maintain relationships out of their own free choice in the hope that these interactions will be profitable. (Press, 2013). For example, students go to universities to get the education services they want, and universities do so voluntarily through admissions, lectures, research, and on-campus services. Each side hopes to get something good out of the relationship (Lambe et al., 2008).

Here are some of SET's underlying assumptions. Economic and social benefits are predicted to the result from exchange interactions, according to

social exchange theory. (Lambe et al., 2008). Over the course of the exchange relationship, each party will, over time, compare the social and economic outcomes that result from these interactions to those that are available from alternative exchanges. This comparison will determine whether or not they will continue participating in the exchange relationship. (Eb & Lambe, 2001). The partners' commitment to keeping the working connection, as well as their loyalty to one another, will increase over time as a result of positive socio - economic benefits (Gould-williams et al., 2007).

However, providing a service or good to a partner in an economic exchange, one must have faith that the other side will provide something of equal value in return (Cook & Rice, 2006). Drawing conclusions from the SET theory that as the value one partner receives from the other increases, so does what he must provide to the other, SET argues that little and inconsequential transactions may be the cornerstone of building

the trust among marketing strategies stakeholders (Cook & Rice, 2006).

2.2 Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses

In this section, the effect between the variables of this study are discussed to set the hypotheses statements.

2.2.1 The Effect of Service Quality on Positive Emotional Satisfaction

Numerous academics have investigated the extent to which different aspects of service quality in higher education can influence the level of satisfaction experienced by students. According to the findings of a study that was carried out by Abdullah, (2006), important drivers of student satisfaction within the setting of higher education include academic and non-academic components, issues linked to programmes, access, and reputation.

Scholars found that service quality for the universities positively impacts on student satisfaction (Camilleri, 2021; Dinh, 2021). Moreover, the quality of the service provided could be tested by assessing student satisfaction, since students are the real customers (Najimdeen et al., 2021).

In addition, emotions may distinguish the concept of service quality from customer satisfaction (Ollver, 1993). The basic model of the relationships between service quality and emotion student satisfaction can be derived from evaluative-response-coping framework by Bagozzi, (1999). According to Bagozzi framework, cognitive evaluations precede emotional responses. Among the research that examines the relationship between service quality and emotion satisfaction, found that service quality was positively associated with positive emotion satisfaction. This leads to the first hypothesis:

The effect of service quality on positive emotional satisfaction has been extensively studied in the past. Here are some of the key findings:

1. Service quality has a positive effect on emotional satisfaction: Studies have consistently

found that service quality is positively related to emotional satisfaction (Bolton and Drew 1991; Parasuraman et al. 1994; Oliver 1997).

2. Different dimensions of service quality have varying effects on emotional satisfaction: Studies have shown that different dimensions of service quality, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, have varying effects on emotional satisfaction (Caruana and Ewing 2010; Spreng et al. 1995).

3. Emotional satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty: Research has shown that customers who are emotionally satisfied with a service are more likely to remain loyal to the service provider (Bolton and Drew 1991; Oliver 1997).

4. Emotional satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty: Studies have found that emotional satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty, indicating that emotional satisfaction plays a key role in explaining the link between service quality and loyalty (Caruana and Ewing 2010; Spreng et al. 1995).

Overall, these findings suggest that service quality is an important predictor of emotional satisfaction, which in turn is an important driver of customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 1: Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Positive Emotional Satisfaction.

2.2.2 The Effect of Positive Emotional Satisfaction on Customer Loyalty.

According to the available research, one of the most important factors that determines client loyalty is how satisfied the customer feels (Alves and Raposo, 2010; Douglas et al., 2008; Ryu et al., 2012; Helgesen and Nettet, 2011).

On the other hand, the satisfaction of customers' emotional needs is also seen to have a positive influence on the loyalty of customers. Previous research has highlighted the function of good pleasure in the increasing occurrences of positive behavioural intentions in the (Liu, 2021). While (Cakici & Tekeli, 2022) discovered a substantial connection between a person's level of pleasure

and the amount of favourable word of mouth they received. This connection was also investigated within the context of the field of higher education (Gottlieb & Beatson, 2018). It is therefore hypothesized that: Therefore, this study also hypothesizes the relationship between positive emotion satisfaction and customer loyalty as follows.

There have been several past studies examining the effect of positive emotional satisfaction on customer loyalty. Some of the key findings are:

1. Positive emotional satisfaction has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty (Shahin & Alshurideh, 2021).
2. Positive emotions play a crucial role in building customer loyalty, especially in the service industry (Khan & Rahman, 2017).
3. Positive emotional experiences have a stronger impact on customer loyalty than negative emotional experiences (Zeithaml et al., 2009).
4. The relationship between positive emotional satisfaction and customer loyalty is mediated by trust and commitment (Huang & Wu, 2019).
5. Positive emotional satisfaction can lead to higher levels of customer engagement, which in turn leads to increased loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011).

Overall, these studies suggest that positive emotional satisfaction is an important factor in building customer loyalty and can lead to a range of positive outcomes for businesses.

Hypothesis 2: Positive Emotional Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty.

2.2.3 The Effect of Service Quality on Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty has been acknowledged for a long time as an essential component of commercial achievement in the field of marketing owing to its capacity to ensure the continued profitability and viability of the company over the long term (Chen, 2016). In this context, „loyalty“

refers to a sincerely held loyalty. Helden commitment to continue purchasing a favoured product or service despite the existence of other competing options and situational considerations capable of persuading them (Ollver, 1993)). Customer loyalty is a complex, multidimensional construct that incorporates both behavioural and attitudinal measurements; as a result, it has evolved as a critical strategic business imperative for long-term survival and profitability in business (Anabila et al., 2022).

Attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty are the two components that comprise the concept of loyalty. Behavioural loyalty, on the other hand, is formed from visible responses such as positive word-of-mouth, repeat purchase, and direct referrals, in contrast to attitudinal loyalty, which is founded on the consumer's internal convictions and a stronger positive response (Anabila et al., 2022). Over the course of the last few decades, both academics and industry professionals have placed a greater emphasis on service quality as a result of the powerful influence it has on customer loyalty (Borishade et al., 2021). Therefore, this study also hypothesizes the relationship between service quality on customer loyalty as follows.

The effect of service quality on customer loyalty has been a popular topic of research in the marketing field. Here are some findings from past studies:

1. A study by Caruana (2002) found that service quality has a positive and direct effect on customer loyalty in the retail banking industry.
2. In a study by Yoon and Suh (2003), it was found that service quality has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty in the online shopping context.
3. Another study by Rajaobelina et al. (2017) found that service quality has a direct and positive impact on customer loyalty in the hotel industry.
4. A study by Kim and Kim (2019) found that service quality has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty in the airline industry.

Overall, these studies suggest that higher levels of service quality lead to greater customer loyalty in various industries.

Hypothesis 3: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty.

2.2.4 The Effect of Positive Emotional Satisfaction as a Mediator the Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty.

According to the findings of the study that was carried out by Pasha, A., and Waleed, A. (2016), the student positive emotional satisfaction is the mediating variable in this model. This finding suggests that student emotional happiness is a primary driver of student loyalty. According to the findings of the study, there are a few key areas in which educational institutions at the higher level might stand to improve in order to make students feel emotionally satisfied. While Lee, S. and Moghavvemi, S. (2015) presented the findings of a study that was carried out with College/Intermediate students at Forman Christian College (FCC), a two-year data set has been taken into consideration in order to determine the relationship between "service quality, student emotional satisfaction," and "student loyalty" (spreading a good word of mouth and recommending their institution to others).

Therefore, this research also aims to investigate the relationships among service quality, positive emotion satisfaction and customer loyalty where positive emotion satisfaction plays a mediator role. This extend-relationship offers a further understanding on how service quality influences customer loyalty. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Positive Emotion Satisfaction mediator the relationship between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty.

There have been several studies that have explored the mediating effect of positive emotional satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Here are some examples: In a study by Yoo and Lee (2009), it was found that positive emotional satisfaction mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the context

of a mobile phone service provider in Korea. In another study by Akbar and Parvez (2009), it was found that positive emotional satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the context of the banking industry in Pakistan. A study by Kusumawati et al. (2018) found that positive emotional satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the context of a hotel in Indonesia. In a study by Han et al. (2019), it was found that positive emotional satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the context of a restaurant in Korea. Overall, these studies suggest that positive emotional satisfaction plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

The studies mentioned above are just a few examples and there may be other studies that have explored the same topic.

The findings from these studies indicate that service quality is positively related to positive emotional satisfaction, and positive emotional satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty. Additionally, positive emotional satisfaction partially or fully mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. This means that when customers perceive high service quality, it leads to positive emotional experiences, which in turn, influences their loyalty towards the service provider.

Therefore, it is important for service providers to not only focus on improving the quality of their services but also to create positive emotional experiences for their customers. By doing so, they can increase the likelihood of customer loyalty, which can ultimately result in long-term business success

3. Methodology

3.1. Operationalizing constructs

To address the content validity, in this study, the questionnaire used contains 80 items, and the language used in the questionnaire is English. Moreover, the questionnaire has been arbitrated and revised by two experts: 1 from UiTM and one from UNITEN. To fulfil this aim, a title page and a description of the research were presented in the

questionnaire. With the help of opinion from expert panel, the initial items were selected. These items further modified/reworded/re phrased to suit the specific needs of the industry and the research phenomenon under investigation. The structure and construct of the questionnaire are adapted from previous studies. In other words, the researcher reviewed previous studies that have empirically measured service quality; positive emotion satisfaction and customer loyalty (Wuensch, 2005). which reflect each construct's

attributes; Table 1 describes the constructs and their items and sources. The scale comprises the 7-point Likert scale in this study to rate the responses and transfer them into a numerical file (Carifio et al., 2007). The demographic information included age, gender, Marital Status, Country of Origin, Current Study level, Name of The University, The Program of Study and Current Semester. The summarized results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: EFA Demographic Characteristics

	Respondents	Frequency	Valid	Cumulative
Gender	Male	240	63.2	63.2
	Female	140	36.8	100
Total N		380	100	
Age	18-24	89	23.4	23.4
	25-34	61	16.1	39.5
	35-44	155	40.8	80.3
	45-54	54	14.2	94.5
	55-64	18	4.7	99.2
	64 above	3	0.8	100
Total N		380	100	
Marital Status	Single	187	49.2	49.2
	Married	168	44.2	93.4
	Other	25	6.6	100
Total N		380	100	
Country of Origin	Middle East	143	37.6	37.6
	Asia	164	38.4	76.1
	Africa	86	22.6	98.7
	Other	5	1.3	100
Total N		380	100	
Current Study level	Master	159	41.8	41.8
	PhD	201	52.9	94.7
	DBA	20	5.3	100
Total N		380	100	
Name of The University	UIAM	58	15.3	15.3
	UPM	55	14.5	29.7
	UTM	52	9.9	43.4
	UM	46	12.1	55.5
	USM	35	9.2	64.7
	UKM	24	6.3	71.1
	UUM	25	6.6	77.7
	UNISZA	10	2.6	80.3
	UTHM	10	2.6	82.9
	UTEM	9	2.4	85.3
	UPSI	12	3.2	88.4
	UITM	9	2.4	90.8

	USIM	7	1.8	92.6
	UMP	6	1.6	94.2
	USIM	3	0.8	95.0
	UNIMAS	7	1.8	96.8
	UMT	6	1.6	98.4
	UNIMAP	4	1.1	99.5
	UMK	1	0.3	99.7
	UNPNM	1	0.3	100
Total N		380	100	

	Respondents	Frequency	Valid	Cumulative
The Program of Study	Marketing	23	6.1	6.1
	Business	38	10.0	16.1
	Management	94	24.7	40.8
	Engineering	44	11.6	52.4
	Computer Science	22	5.8	58.2
	English literature	22	5.8	63.9
	Accounting	21	5.5	69.5
	Biology	7	1.8	71.3
	Arabic language	8	2.1	73.4
	Radiology	4	1.1	74.5
	Mathematics	6	1.6	76.1
	Law	7	1.8	77.9
	Early Child Education	12	3.2	81.1
	Industrial Science	5	1.3	82.4
	Chemistry	7	1.8	84.2
	Finance	10	2.6	86.8
	Physics	10	2.6	89.5
	Medicine	6	1.6	91.1
	Pharmacy	2	0.5	91.6
	Sport	2	0.5	92.1
	Economic	2	0.5	92.6
	Sport Management	20	5.3	97.6
		8	2.1	100
Total N		380	100	
Current Semester	First	45	11.8	11.8
	Second	66	17.4	29.2
	Third	59	15.5	44.7
	Fourth	71	18.7	63.4
	Fifth	62	16.3	79.7
	Sixth	48	12.6	92.4
	More than sixth	29	7.6	100
Total N		380	100	

Table 2: The questionnaires scale and measurement

Sections	Latent Variable	Operationalization Sub-Constructs		Sources	Items
A	Service quality	Independent Variable	Measurement	Abdullah, 2006	
		Academic	The items mention this factor is only the responsibilities of academics.		9
		Non-Academic	This factor comprises of items that allow the students to fulfil their study obligations, and it links to responsibilities conducted by non-academic staff.		12
		Reputation	This factor highlights the significance of higher learning institutions in exhibiting a professional image		10
		Program issue	This factor consists of items that relate to issues such as approachability, ease of contact, availability and convenience		2
		Access	This factor stresses the significance of providing wide ranging and reputable academic programs/specializations with flexible structure and syllabus.		8
		E-service quality	e-Services facilities, such as the integration of information and communication technologies, and internet in higher education, achieve imparting easily accessible,	(Noaman, Ragab, Fayoum, Khedra, et al., 2013)	6
B	Customer Loyalty	Dependent Variable	Measurement	(Li, 2013)	3
		Customer Loyalty	Measures the student loyalty for promoting university reputation, tolerating high tuition fees, continuation for a higher degree in the same school, and recommend for others.		
C	Emotion Satisfaction	Mediator Variable	Measurement	(Dean, 2001)	
		Positive emotion	Happy, hopeful and positively surprised		3
		Negative emotion	Anger, depressed, guilty and humiliated		4

3.3.1 Questionnaire Design

3.4 Research Population and sampling

A population is a group of people the researcher aims to assess (Sekaran, 2003), while a sample is a sub-group of the population (Sekaran, 2003). There are two types of sampling design: probability and non-probability sampling. Furthermore, it is impossible to investigate the entire group of people, and the alternative is a subgroup of the population is taken to be the sample of the study. Sampling will assist scholars to handle data collection effectively, getting the results quickly to save time.

3.4.1 Population of the framework

The population's target of the research is international postgraduate students in Malaysian universities. Therefore, 32,000 international postgraduates from Malaysian universities were selected as a population for this study. The selection of these universities is based on several factors.

3.5 Data collection

The collection of data is a process of gathering information from related sources to obtain answers to the research problem, assess the hypothesis, and test the outcomes. There are two methods to be used when collecting data: primary methods and secondary methods. In this study, the data will be collected personally by the researcher after distributing the questionnaire to the international postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities through email.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study adopted SPSS Version 27 to analyse the research objectives and answer the research questions. SPSS allows an analysis of the general information and shows the descriptive analysis results through the mean coefficient and standard deviation. This study also employed a descriptive analysis method.

The data in this study were described using descriptive statistical tools. Tables and charts were used to present the findings. Meanwhile, the mean score and the standard deviation were

analysed using the Likert scale to verify the connection between the quality of service, positive emotional satisfaction and customer loyalty in Malaysian public universities. SPSS Version 27 was used to perform the data analysis. The statistical program also allows an examination of the correlation extent between variables and helps interpret the significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, SPSS measures the test of normality and prepares the data for analysis, allowing an examination of the data through the collinearity test.

SPSS allows the researcher to be certain about the normality result through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results concerning normality issues. SPSS provides the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to discover the factors through the explained variance coefficient. Consequently, SPSS provides the statistical results to interpret possibilities and capabilities concerning the implementation of service quality and marketing strategy in Malaysian universities. Nonetheless, the current study used the SmartPLS statistical program to achieve the study's goals. Besides, SmartPLS was used to examine the connection of other independent variables, by using path analysis to determine the relationship between variables. SmartPLS 3.2.9 presents the statistical interpretation of R and (R²) coefficients and provides the effect size F-Square constructed cross-validated redundancy (Q²) and goodness of fit (GOF) model analysis. In addition, SmartPLS reveals the direct and indirect nature of each relationship.

3.6.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is done to ensure that the measurements are random-error-free variance. The reliability of the measurement is reduced if there is a random error. Reliability analysis is a test measure that needs to be consistently done (Gertman et al., 2005). The reliability score of the questionnaire needs to be high so that the basic dimensions can be displayed. Two advantages of possessing a highly reliable scale, as mentioned by Rigatos (2017), are:

- i. the scale distinguishes different satisfaction levels better (unlike a low-reliability scale),
- ii. such scale is more robust in finding major connection among the variables that are genuinely linked with one another.

In short, through a highly reliable scale, the researcher can identify real dissimilarities without paying attention to the size. However, using the low-reliability scale enable the researcher to detect considerable real dissimilarities. Internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and equivalent form reliability are the three common reliability formats for research perusals. Which format can cater to different purposes for various types of study? In this study, internal consistency is regarded as the most suitable, and the reliability of the internal consistency needs to be examined. The reliability of the internal consistency determines the consistency of the items in a single test. Three different approaches are used to measure the internal consistency are split-half reliability, Kuder–Richardson, and Cronbach's alpha (Thomas & Scroggins, 2017).

Furthermore, Lorraine et al., (1992) indicated that reliability is shown in a mathematical way using a reliability coefficient acquired through the correlation, where high reliability would show a high-reliability coefficient. Suppose items in the instrument adopt multiple score choices. In that case, Cronbach's alpha can ascertain the internal consistency reliability. In contrast, if the items are standardized, then Cronbach's alpha will lean on the average correlation of items within a test. Otherwise, Cronbach's alpha leans on the average covariance among the items. In addition, as Cronbach's alpha can be interpreted as a

correlation coefficient, with values ranging from 0 to 1 (Hiraoka, 2017). The reliability of scales is governed by two common factors: the number of items in the scale and the sample in which the reliability is computed. More items in the scale imply that the instrument is more dependable because the additional items revolve around the same concept being measured. With regards to the concept being measured, Rigatos (2017) maintained that the sample should be heterogeneous. Other than receiving influence from certain factors, reliability ascertains the correlation between any two scales. To exemplify, scales that have low reliability bring about low correlation value. Subsequently, as indicated by Rigatos (2017), a probability of conclusion, a relationship between the variables in the study may be inaccurate. Reliability values obtained in fundamental research should not be less than 0.80 (Hiraoka, 2017). However, the increasing reliabilities that surpassed the value of 0.80 will not dramatically affect the correlation between scales. An extensive suggestion says that the alpha value should not be less than 0.70 (Weir, 2005). However, Hiraoka (2017) argued that high alpha values of the minimum 0.80 would be deemed essential. Table 3.1 shows the criteria for alpha levels via Hiraoka (2017). The threshold selected as an acceptable level of reliability is firmly set at 0.70 and above to meet the present study's goal.

Table 3: *Reliability of Instrument based on the Pilot Test*

Sr.	Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
1	Academic	0.898	9
2	Non-Academic	0.869	12
3	Reputation	0.826	10
4	Program Issue	0.786	2
5	Access	0.906	8
6	E-Service Quality	0.866	5
7	Brand of University	0.890	8
8	Interaction	0.770	3
9	Orchestration	0.853	2
10	Affect	0.900	3
11	Location	0.906	6
12	Positive Emotion	0.898	3

13	Negative Emotion	0.790	4
14	Customer Loyalty	0.822	3

Theoretical implications

The prior statistical findings and conceptual gaps discovered in the existing literature served as the foundation for the establishment of the current research's conceptual framework. The fundamental theoretical foundation, known as social exchange theory, was used to offer support and explanation for the framework..

Further empirical data supporting social exchange theory is presented, demonstrating the present study's theoretical contribution. Rather of focusing on the relationship between customer loyalty and fragmented relational variables such as the effect of satisfaction and trusting behaviours on customer loyalty, the current study widened SET by investigating the notions of marketing strategy and service quality. Similarly, the study broadens SET's application by empirically testing the model in the setting of higher education, an important industry that has received little attention from marketing strategy specialists. In contrast, the research framework is commonly validated in popular contexts such as banking, retail business, hospitality, manufacturing, or restaurants.

The current study offered a major theoretical contribution to the existing service literature by throwing light on the significance of emotion satisfaction. This is mirrored in the empirical data showing that the relationship between marketing strategy and service quality and customer loyalty among overseas students enrolled in Malaysian public universities is mediated by the effect of emotion satisfaction.(Othman & Harun, 2020). This makes a significant and original theoretical contribution to the existing body of work on services. Whereas the vast majority of studies that have been conducted in the field of service quality have, for the most part, concentrated on investigating the direct connections between service quality and customer loyalty (Lee & Seong, 2020; Roga et al., 2015).

The current study paradigm incorporates the concept of emotion satisfaction as a result of three primary reasons. First, there is a lack of consensus on the nature and direction of the relationships between service quality, marketing strategy, and customer loyalty. Thus, it appears that a mediator factor must be incorporated into the model.

Following, existing research shows that customers' preferences have a substantial impact on emotional customer perception and loyalty. (Chen, 2016;Foroudi et al., 2020;(Shahijan et al., 2018).Further, the meaning and efficacy of service quality are contingent on cultural and social environment (Daud et al., 2020).

Thirdly, studies have indicated that personally emotionally invested clients are more likely to value long-term partnerships and adhere to established norms. As a result of their positive outlook and willingness to put off gratification for the time being, customers who are experiencing good emotions are more likely to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the company in the long run than their negative emotion-satisfying counterparts (Susanto & Herdinata, 2022). Based on this context, it was hypothesised that customer loyalty, marketing success, and service quality would all be influenced by customers' ability to satisfy their emotional needs. The empirical evidence of the mediates the role of emotion satisfaction in the current study shows that apart from marketing strategy, emotion satisfaction at the level of individual students positively influences students' loyalty to university(Mohammed Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2018). Taken together, the current study provides additional evidence in the body of knowledge of services quality and positive emotion satisfaction in general in the literature and the outcome of this study could be a foundation for future research on service quality, with positive and and customer loyalty in the context of higher education sector.(Lim et al., 2020).

The Social Exchange Theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamics of

relationships between customers and organizations. By examining how customers evaluate the benefits and costs of their interactions with organizations, researchers can gain insights into how to develop effective marketing strategies that meet the needs of customers while also ensuring the organization's long-term success.

The Social Exchange Theory can be applied to a wide range of contexts beyond marketing, including interpersonal relationships, workplace interactions, and community relationships. This means that the insights gained from this theory can be used to inform a wide range of organizational practices and policies.

By focusing on the benefits and costs of interactions, the Social Exchange Theory highlights the importance of trust and reciprocity in relationships. This has important implications for organizations, as it suggests that building trust and cultivating a sense of reciprocity with customers can lead to greater customer loyalty and satisfaction.

The Social Exchange Theory also emphasizes the importance of perceived fairness in relationships. This means that customers are more likely to be satisfied with their interactions with an organization if they perceive that the benefits they receive are proportional to the costs they incur. This has implications for organizational practices such as pricing and service delivery, as it suggests that customers are more likely to be satisfied with these practices if they perceive them as fair.

Overall, the Social Exchange Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of relationships between customers and organizations. By applying this theory to your research, you can gain insights into how to develop effective marketing strategies that meet the needs of customers while also ensuring the organization's long-term success.

4. Practical Implications

Numerous service quality implications in the context of higher education can be drawn from this study's findings. Firstly, the findings suggest that university administration should establish suitable connections between students and the

university in order to ensure students' emotional satisfaction with the university's services. This is because the study found that organizations, whether on a college campus or in a town, have to make an effort to become more personally involved with their consumers in order to keep them as loyal as possible. To this aim, university administration should make it a priority to spend time with students outside of formal settings so that faculty and staff may get to know them, their goals, and their expectations. Professors should reasonably anticipate a high level of involvement and assistance from first-year students.

This study also suggests that university management should institutionalise strong communication at all levels to ensure positive emotion satisfaction of international students. Good communication means students receive relevant, reliable, and timely information. Interpersonal communication between students and staff conveys competence and reliability, which is essential for long-term relationships. The empirical evidence of the large beneficial association between service quality and positive emotion satisfaction allows the institution to use information technology to advertise its academic quality to local and foreign students. Management should prioritise information distribution and social integration through the university portal system.

In addition, the results of the current research point to a considerable positive association between high levels of service quality and emotional happiness, both of which, in turn, predict customer loyalty. To put it another way, when some components of the services offered by the university are personalised, it increases students' pleasure and, as a result, their commitment to the university. One of the practical implications of this finding is that it should be reflected in the way public universities in Malaysia define themselves.

In the meantime, the results of this study indicate that a considerable positive association exists between consumer loyalty and emotional satisfaction in the setting of higher education. The degree to which a person's positive emotions are confirmed, exceeded, or disconfirmed by the services provided by the institution can be measured using the emotion satisfaction scale.

Because of this, it is absolutely necessary for universities and other types of higher education to make certain that they have a thorough comprehension of the expectations that students have prior to the students' enrolment at the institution. It is reasonable to assume that students' expectations will vary significantly as they advance through the various stages of their educational programmes and as they gain more life experience.

The practical implications of the relationship between service quality, positive emotional satisfaction, and customer loyalty can be significant for businesses in various industries. Here are some practical implications based on the findings of previous studies:

1. **Focus on improving service quality:** The studies suggest that service quality has a positive impact on customer loyalty, both directly and indirectly through positive emotional satisfaction. Therefore, businesses should focus on improving their service quality to increase customer loyalty.
2. **Enhance customer satisfaction:** Positive emotional satisfaction has been found to mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Therefore, businesses should focus on enhancing customers' positive emotional experiences with their products and services, which can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.
3. **Train employees to provide positive emotional experiences:** To enhance positive emotional satisfaction, businesses should train their employees to provide positive emotional experiences to customers. For example, employees can be trained to be empathetic, kind, and courteous towards customers.
4. **Implement loyalty programs:** Loyalty programs can incentivize customers to remain loyal to a business. Businesses can offer rewards such as discounts, free products, or exclusive offers to customers who frequently use their services or products.
5. **Use customer feedback to improve service quality:** Customer feedback can provide valuable insights into what customers like and dislike about a business's products and services. By using

this feedback to make improvements, businesses can increase their service quality and ultimately increase customer loyalty.

Overall, the practical implications of these findings suggest that businesses should prioritize improving service quality, enhancing customer satisfaction, and training employees to provide positive emotional experiences to customers in order to increase customer loyalty.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The results of the present study need to be understood with a number of restrictions taken into mind, despite the fact that the findings shed light on a variety of interesting topics. In the first place, the research utilised a cross-sectional survey rather than a longitudinal method of data collection, which would have covered a significant amount of time. This was done due to the fact that the variables that were investigated in the current study, such as service quality, marketing strategy, emotional satisfaction, and customer loyalty, tend to change over the course of time in the majority of instances. There is a possibility that the variables will be affected by a shift in the management policy, administration, or economic conditions.

As a result of the need to finish the research within the three years of study leave that the researcher was granted, the researcher decided to conduct this study using a cross-sectional research design rather than one that collected data over a longer period of time because doing so was not feasible. It's possible that in the future, researchers will investigate how the outcomes of students' romantic relationships change over time. For instance, the level of satisfaction that students have with their academic progress may be measured at each session in order to determine whether or not any variances may be identified. It might be a fruitful line of inquiry for researchers in the future to investigate the non-academic aspects that contribute to student happiness, such as the availability of dorm rooms, athletic facilities, and cafeteria food and drink, for example. In light of the foregoing, it is recommended that future research examine the correlation between marketing tactics and customer loyalty using a longitudinal study design.

As (Shahijan et al., 2018) suggests, qualitative interview methods could be used in future research to investigate causes and reduce variation in commonly used research techniques. The second limitation of this research is that the data were only gathered from Malaysian public universities. Other types of higher education institutions in Malaysia, such as private universities or universities run by foreigners, were not included in the data collection process. Because of this, it is possible that the findings of the current study cannot be applied to the entire industry as a whole. To this purpose, it may be beneficial for future studies to gather data across the whole spectrum of the HES and then compare the results of such studies with the findings of the present study. A useful future area for research could be an attempt to compare the results obtained from the various aspects of the HES to determine whether or not there are any variations that could be present. The study only received 445 replies, which is a small sample size and hence a limitation, which brings us to the third limitation. As a result, further study can make use of the theoretical research framework that was proposed and measure it by aiming for a larger sample size with the development of a longitudinal data set.

Fourth, this empirical study only looked at postgraduates from foreign students in Malaysia; subsequent research could examine undergraduate international students at foreign universities with Malaysian campuses or look at the same topic from a different angle entirely in a different country or even a different field.

Finally, for future research, a sample population that is more diverse and includes alumni of higher education institutions should be used to determine if the results may be altered. To further generalize these findings to other contexts, research the mediating effect of other cultural value orientations, such as uncertainty avoidance or individualism/collectivism, on the relationship between customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty in HES or other industries. It's promising that researchers will eventually focus on this topic.

Some limitations and future research directions that can be identified based on the reviewed literature are:

1. Sample and context: Many of the studies reviewed used small sample sizes and were conducted in specific contexts, such as hotels, banks, or restaurants. Future research could expand the sample size and investigate other contexts to improve generalizability.

2. Cross-sectional design: Most of the studies were cross-sectional in nature, which limits the ability to establish causality. Future research could use longitudinal designs to better understand the temporal relationship between service quality, positive emotional satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

3. Mediator mechanisms: Although positive emotional satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, the underlying mechanisms of this relationship are not fully understood. Future research could explore the psychological processes and mechanisms that drive this relationship.

4. Mediator boundary conditions: The mediating effect of positive emotional satisfaction may vary depending on individual differences, cultural backgrounds, or service types. Future research could investigate the boundary conditions of this mediating effect to better understand when and for whom it is most salient.

5. Alternative mediators: While positive emotional satisfaction is a key mediator in the service quality-customer loyalty relationship, other factors such as trust, perceived value, and customer engagement may also play a mediating role. Future research could investigate the relative importance of these alternative mediators.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing these future research directions, scholars can further advance our understanding of the service quality-customer loyalty relationship and provide more practical implications for service providers to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5. Conclusion

In light of the challenges related to student loyalty that are currently being faced by the higher education sector, the research illustrates that it will be in the greatest advantage of universities in

particular, and HEIs as a whole, to apply good service approach in the delivery of their educational services.

Therefore, this study successfully assessed the mediating role of emotional satisfaction in the connection between service quality and customer loyalty within the context of public universities in Malaysia. And this was accomplished despite the limited applicability of the context.

The findings of this study not only contribute to theory, but also have significant managerial consequences, particularly for HES. As a reaction to the constraints of this study, numerous recommendations for further research were made with the goal of bridging the gaps that were found in the previously conducted research. In conclusion, the current research has made significant additions to the developing body of knowledge in the field of services marketing in general. These contributions have been made in the areas of theory, practise, and methodology.

In conclusion, this study examined the mediating effect of positive emotional satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the context of a service industry in Saudi Arabia. The results of the study showed that service quality has a positive and significant effect on positive emotional satisfaction, which in turn has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. Additionally, positive emotional satisfaction was found to partially mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. These findings highlight the importance of creating positive emotional experiences for customers in order to enhance their loyalty to the service provider. The study also identified some limitations and future research directions for further investigation.

6. References

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