

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

eSERVQUAL, eWOM REFERENCE, AND eBRAND EQUITY MODEL: THE EXTENDED THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR IN THE PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION CHOICE BEHAVIOUR

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—Abstract—

This study aims to empirically examine the electronic service quality (eSERVQUAL), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) reference, and university electronic brand equity (eBrand Equity) constructs that extend the theory of planned behavior to the higher education choice behavior of higher education students in Indonesia. Five hundred and five valid data points were collected from Indonesian higher education students using purposive sampling and analyzed using structural equation modeling and the statistical application AMOS 26. The result indicates that eSERVQUAL, eWOM reference, and

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university eBrand Equity influence students' selection of higher education. This result suggests that higher education website service quality (eSERVQUAL), eWOM, and university eBrand Equity could enhance student candidates' higher education selection behavior. This research extends the theory of planned behavior that concentrates on the influences of eSERVQUAL, which represents an attitude, eWOM reference, which means the subjective norm; and higher education eBrand Equity, which represents perceived behavior control, in selecting private higher education.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behaviour Control, eSERVQUAL, eWOM Reference, eBrand Equity, Higher Education Choice Behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the single most important thing that every generation should strive to attain because the degree to which a nation's academic and non-academic abilities play roles in the era of science, technology, and communication amongst other countries is difficult to predict, which makes the advancement or decadence of a nation dependent on the academic and non-academic capabilities of that nation's generation. Students who pursue higher education have the opportunity to improve their academic performance as well as their intellectual capacity and professional competence.

Increasing development and competition among higher education institutions, including even the foreign universities established in Indonesia, such as Monas University and the Swiss German University in Indonesia, cause marketing competition between them, especially among private higher education institutions, to recruit students. This is especially true for private higher education institutions. Some higher education institutions' development and improvement efforts to give differences (diversification) induce homogenous change among other higher education institutions, improving students' bargaining power and their higher education choices. Both public and private institutions of higher education are responsible for appropriately addressing crucial elements such as increased competitiveness and changing environmental conditions.

In light of this circumstance, private institutions of higher education are obligated to demonstrate their competitive excellence by regulating the conditions of the competition to assign places and promotions according to the students' point of view. Some research is pertinent to university choices that have developed a theoretical framework to explain university choice intention behavior (Briggs et al., 2007; Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Maringe, 2006; Wong et al., 2018). This framework was created to explain university choice intention behavior. Hemsley-Brown et al. (2015) investigate the education database to conduct a literature search to examine the factors associated with university selection behavior. This study aims to investigate the strategies private higher education institutions utilize to increase their competitiveness and market share in today's digital environment. Private higher education institutions

want to win the competition by influencing customers' purchasing behavior (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Samson et al., 2014; Yasmin et al., 2015).

The company implemented the concept of digital marketing. Kannan (2017), like Rowley (2008), Royle et al. (2014), D. F. E.-C. Chaffey (2016), view marketing from the perspective of the customer. Kannan (2017), Rowley (2008), Taken Smith (2012), Royle et al. (2014), and D. F. E.-C. Chaffey (2016) focus on the fascinating content that the company has to offer. According to Briggs et al. (2007), students' behavior in choosing higher education while in the student recruiting process provides a basis for defining efficient higher education marketing. This is especially true in conditions of fierce competition and a more enormous higher education system.

In this day and age of information technology, many educational establishments are concentrating on developing higher education website platforms to advertise their educational offerings to a more extensive customer base. In addition to managerial and administrative support services, academic activity assistance is covered on the website for higher education. Considering that the market focus is customers who look for information before choosing a higher education school, the higher education institution's awareness of the quality and service of the campus website should be exercised effectively and efficiently. The effectiveness of the website service provided by higher education institutions is necessary to the educational phenomena that the digital era has brought about in the present day.

In the realm of online commerce, much research has been conducted with eSERVQUAL to investigate the influence of electronic service. Within the context of the online research, the term "eSERVQUAL" refers to evaluating the level of excitement provided by the electronic service quality. Seroquel can be described as "how far a website facilitates product and service activities on the internet effectively and efficiently" (Bressolles et al., 2011; Parasuraman et al., 2005).

Because it affects their lives after graduation, selecting the appropriate institution of higher education is a highly important decision for students to make. Higher education is sometimes regarded as a purchase decision that comes with a high level of involvement risk. This is because selecting a higher education entails a significant monetary commitment for tuition for around four years and the student's self-image and future opportunities. When it comes to student recruitment, a solid understanding of the factors influencing a student's decision to pursue higher education is necessary. It is essential to determine and investigate the behaviors of student candidates in Indonesian private higher education institutions in the present day. Based on Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB), the authors present a study framework on private higher education choosing behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a robust and well-organized paradigm that can be used to explain behavior.

Bhattacharjee (2000) and Zolait (2010) conducted research in which they investigated the relationship between word-of-mouth marketing and a subjective norm, and they found a significant association between the two. According to Doh et al. (2009) and Lim (2015), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can affect customers' intentions to make purchases of online products. Wong et al. (2020) researched behaviors related to attitude and subjective norms to explain the inclination to accept references from other people while selecting institutions. The fact that numerous researchers have already utilized the construct of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in a variety of different domains is a limitation of this form of study. Despite this, there is no research conducted in Indonesia on the development of behaviors leading to the selection of higher education in this age of digital technology. This study uses the higher education website digital service (eSERVQUAL), eWOM reference, and eBrand Equity variables, all of which become distinctive predictors of the behavior associated with choosing a higher education institution.

On the other hand, private and public universities compete with one another to attract students by delivering high educational standards. These standards are measured by higher educational accreditation success and can be achieved by national or international accreditation, with a rank of Superior or Excellent. For instance, the National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Indonesia grants the highest accreditation quality with "Excellent (Unggul)," followed by "Superior (Baik Sekali)," "Good (Baik)," and "Enough (Cukup)," with a C rank. Even though public universities in Indonesia hold the highest accreditation, the number of public universities in Indonesia is significantly fewer than the number of private universities. The enormous importance of the university's brand is reflected in the university's achievement of the highest accreditation level. From a theoretical point of view, a strong brand value is an asset for the brand that is referred to as brand equity.

In addition, the number of students who applied to private institutions was found to be more than that of students who applied to public universities, according to the data. The number of applicants, however, fell since the private university in question possessed less brand equity than before. The management universities need to manage their educational quality standards to achieve the highest accreditation quality standards nationally and internationally, as the measurement of higher education academic quality reputation fits with the opinions of Wong et al. (2018) and Wong et al. (2020). To overcome this condition, management universities must achieve the highest accreditation quality standards nationally and internationally. In line with this, Darley et al. (2010) noted that higher education must research the factors influencing student candidates' decisions to pursue higher education. Many universities manage their brands to play an increasing role in online internet or social media (OISM), which enables university brands to have the best strong brand asset in predicting students' choice behavior, which is called eBrand Equity (Grewal et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2009;

Osei-Frimpong et al., 2018). This gives university brands the best asset in predicting students' choice behavior.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen et al., 1992) is a behavior model that offers behavior that could be used to analyze the behavior factors in choosing higher education with three main predictors (attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control) in determining the choice behavior of higher education. This model could analyze the behavior factors in choosing higher education. A few of the researchers tried applying TPB to a variety of object configurations. The TPB model was used by Devika et al. (2020) to explore psychological behavior in the context of selecting a mode of transportation. Gatfield et al. (2006) utilized TPB to predict the factors that motivate students to attend overseas universities. Both Kam et al. (2018) and Cheng et al. (2016) used the TPB model to predict the academic honesty and group project collaboration behavior of senior high school students. In addition, the TPB model has been implemented in the industry of financial services (Alam et al., 2012; Amin et al., 2009; Haron et al., 2011; Siang et al., 2011).

Moreover, Schlaegel et al. (2014) indicated that future research had to concentrate on the antecedents of TPB to investigate the significant aspects. In line with this proposal, this research examines the factors influencing higher education choice behavior among student applicants applying to private institutions. These factors include subjective norms, perceived control over one's behavior, and attitudes toward specific behaviors. The antecedent of behavior control is higher education eBrand Equity, the antecedent of attitude is eSERVQUAL, and the subjective standard is eWOM reference.

Seroquel is the primary antecedent of attitude in predicting higher education choice behavior (Ahmad et al., 2020). It has the potential to increase students' levels of satisfaction (Bunce et al., 2017; Rouf et al., 2016; Thankachan, 2019), which, in turn, will lead to an increase in the long-term viability of higher education performance (Augustine M. Kara, 2016). On the other hand, Demir et al. (2021) found that eSERVQUAL did not directly influence customers' purchase decisions. In addition, Pujadas-Hostench et al. (2019) discovered that eSERVQUAL has a considerable influence on choosing behavior. According to Taherdoost (2018), eSERVQUAL can potentially increase acceptance of technology use. According to Kim-Soon et al. (2014), eSERVQUAL has a considerable impact on the behavior of university students about their use of it. Therefore, it is vital to examine eSERVQUAL through great online service of higher education to affect the attitude of the students candidates in applying for higher education (Kannan, 2017; Royle et al., 2014; D. Chaffey et al., 2012; Lin, 2008; Rowley, 2008;).

The noteworthy finding from Md Husin et al. (2016) is that the eWOM reference, representing subjective norms, greatly affects purchasing behavior. This finding is relevant because the eWOM reference is the TPB framework's main effect on subjective norms. According to the findings of Wong et al. (2020), Johnston (2010),

Al-Majali et al. (1970), and Angst et al. (2009) indicate that references to eWOM can affect individuals' subjective norms, which in turn can bring about students' candidates to utilize higher education in the context of choice and decision behavior. Both Bhattacharjee (2000) and Zolait et al. (2009) concluded that there was a substantial relationship between eWOM reference and subjective norm. This relationship, in turn, would affect buying behavior in online shopping (Doh et al., 2009; Lim, 2015).

According to Pinar et al. (2020)'s research, an important model in inducing the choice behavior of higher education is the higher education brand equity, which represents perceived behavior control in the context of the TPB. According to Sultan et al. (2019) and Nguyen et al. (2016), branding is a reflection of the university's capacity to meet the demands of the student, assist the student candidate in making the appropriate choice of the university program, attract the student candidate, and make them loyal students. According to Reza Jalilvand et al. (2014), branding, including e-brand equity, has a major impact on consumers' decision-making behaviors.

Therefore, using the research purposes indicated above, this research would construct a student behavior model connected to eSERVQUAL, eWOM reference, and eBrand Equity in the TPB framework to establish a new concept that can be evaluated empirically. eSERVQUAL stands for electronic service reliability quality; eWOM stands for electronic word-of-mouth reference; and eBrand Equity stands for electronic brand equity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior

In most cases, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1985), is utilized to analyze the client's behavior. According to TPB, an individual's behavior that is involved in varying behaviors can be predicted with high accuracy by using attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control; this behavior, together with behavioral control perception, explains numerous variations in actual behavior (Ajzen et al., 1992). Robert P. Boyd developed TPB.

According to Ajzen (2020) and colleagues' research from 2020, the TPB is one of the most prominent theories that explain the influence of knowledge and motivation on human behavior. According to Ajzen (2020)'s research, the TPB construct considers "behavior intention" to be a direct antecedent of behavior. According to Švecová et al. (2019), this indicates an individual's readiness to undertake a particular behavior. If an individual's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived level of behavioral control were favorable to the individual, then there would be a greater likelihood that the individual would engage in a particular behavior.

2.2 Attitude Toward Behavior

According to [Fishbein et al. \(2011\)](#), the term "attitude" refers to "the extent an individual obtains either a positive or negative valuation from engaging in a particular behavior." In addition, [Fishbein et al. \(2011\)](#) explain that an attitude is a latent disposition or desire to respond with some degree of like or hate toward a psychological object. They define this as the definition of "attitude." The object of an individual's attitude can be something that can be separated in some way from the individual's reality, including their behavior. According to [Ajzen \(2020\)](#), the elements that can impact an individual's attitude might be either internal or external.

2.3 Subjective Norm

According to [Fishbein et al. \(2011\)](#), subjective norms measure the social pressure on an individual to engage in or abstain from a particular behavior. An individual can be influenced by social pressure in various societies. [Fishbein et al. \(2011\)](#) explain that a person has a confident anticipation of the perceptions of others who are significant to that person regarding their engagement in certain behavior. This expectation relates to the individual's involvement in the behavior. An individual's sense of the societal pressure to perform or abstain from a certain behavior is an example of a subjective norm.

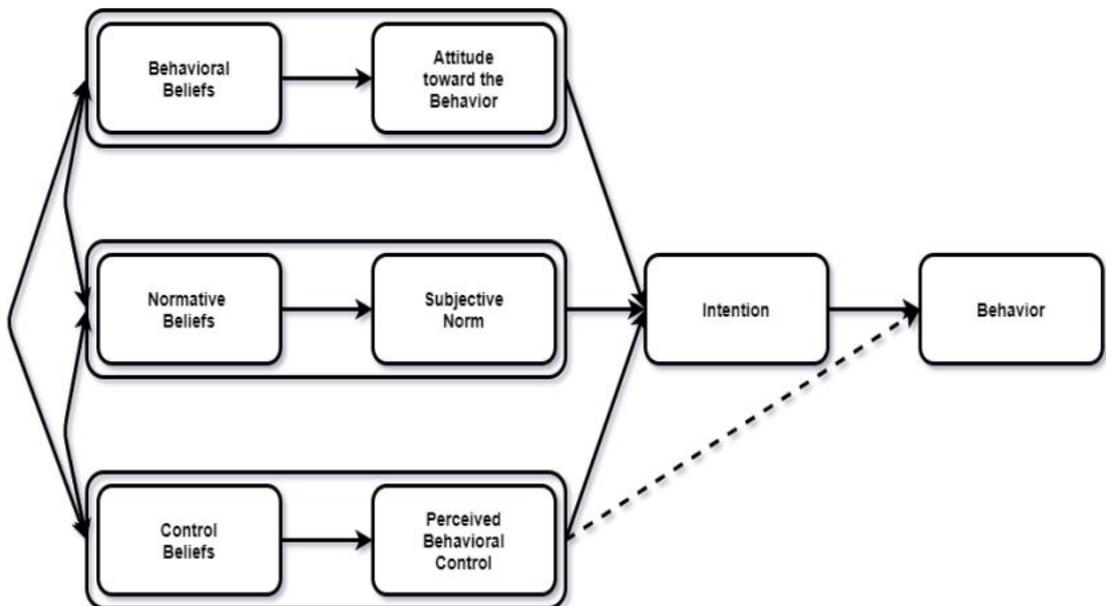


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour

2.4 Electronic Service Quality (eSERVQUAL)

The eSERVQUAL model, with its five dimensions, was first developed by [Berry et al. \(1985\)](#). These dimensions are as follows: palpable, reliable, responsiveness, assurance,

and emphasis on measuring. The SERVQUAL model has seen widespread adoption as a tool for evaluating the quality of service provided in an online setting.

Rowley (2006) creates a model based on eSERVQUAL by identifying several characteristics of electronic service quality. These dimensions include information, communication, delivery, personalization, website features, accessibility, security, responsiveness, and reliability. According to the definition offered by Zeithaml et al. (2002), electronic service quality is defined as an assessment of the degree to which a website can meet the expectations of customers not only during the transaction procedures but also after the transactions have been completed.

2.5 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Reference

Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) is being replaced by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which instantly disseminates information to many individuals via social media and other platforms. Customers can now give, search for, and share anything relevant to companies and their experiences through online channels that go into eWOM communication due to new media and digital development. eWOM refers to the statements, whether favorable or bad, made by individuals who have ever used a product through the internet, whether they are potential or real customers. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), customers share their experiences on opinion platforms primarily to provide social benefits, gain economic incentives, demonstrate concern for others, and practice extraversion or self-improvement. Customers have these goals in mind when they engage in e-word-of-mouth marketing. According to Balakrishnan et al. (2014), electronic word of mouth, also known as eWOM, is a marketing strategy particularly effective in promoting brands to enhance product purchasing intentions through a corporate website. Because of this, eWOM becomes the foundation for the decision-making behaviors of customer candidates.

Communication via eWOM is gaining popularity today as many consumers rely on internet technology to research products before purchasing. Customers can immediately share information on social media websites such as Twitter or Facebook, which has the potential to influence the purchasing decisions of other members of those social media websites where the customers post their responses (Mahrinasari et al., 2017). This is true regardless of whether the customer is pleased with the services or products that they have purchased or is dissatisfied with them.

2.6 Higher Education Choice Behaviour

The extent to which diversity plays a role in determining which student candidates are selected is enormous. A student's life and future are affected by the institution they choose to attend and the program they participate in, and there are other elements relating to the personal and financial sacrifices that are required. Chapman (1986) was one of the first people to apply the theory of purchasing behavior to education. He proposed that student candidates or their parents undergo several stages that may be

classified individually while deciding on an educational institution or a field of study for themselves or their children.

The key to successfully creating and managing marketing and effective recruitment strategies for a higher education institution to attract student candidates is to have a solid understanding of some of the aspects that influence the student's decision regarding his choice of higher education. To use only one example, [Hodkinson et al. \(2013\)](#) proposed that "choice is a rational process limited by a realistic opportunity perception and formed by individual personality." The decision of whether or not to pursue higher education is a multi-step problem-solving process that student applicants carry out during the choosing process. Customer purchasing behavior is the common name given to an established model of the decision-making process involved in making a purchase. According to [Kotler \(2001\)](#), purchasing behavior may be broken down into several stages. These stages include need, passion, information seeking and alternative appraisal, buying choice, and post-purchasing perception.

2.7 Higher Education e-Brand Equity

According to [Argenti \(2000\)](#), [Bunzel \(2007\)](#), and [Jevons \(2006\)](#), branding in higher education, which is essentially a tool for promoting the higher education institution, plays a vital role in identifying the brand of the organization. [Pinar et al. \(2011\)](#), on the other hand, claimed that the brand symbolizes the organization's brand equity. According to [Aaker \(1996\)](#), brand equity is a collection of assets and liabilities in terms of a brand's branding, name, and symbol that have the potential to add to and maintain the value of the products or services associated with the brand.

The consumer's view, their way of thinking and acting about the brand of the products and services, and their purchasing choice about the products and services all contribute to what is known as brand equity. If customers purchase goods or use services based on price alone and pay less attention to the brand itself, this could lead to a reduction in the equity of the company's brand. If, on the other hand, people tend to buy the items or services by considering the brand, even though the competitors provide higher product quality and lower costs, the brand of the products or services has a strong equity value in its brand.

In higher education, brand equity is one of the success elements that attract student applicants to pick higher education as the place where they will complete their studies. According to ([Aaker, 1996](#); [Mahrinasari et al., 2017](#)), a few components make up brand equity. These components include brand awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty.

Higher education institutions build their brands in this age of technological innovation to differentiate their brand universities from competitors. This is accomplished through online marketing (such as a website or social media) to strengthen their brand asset values ([Ramaswamy et al., 2016](#)). As a result, their brand asset values can vitalize their

eBrand Equity assets. eBrand Equity is a solution that enables higher education institutions to use OISM (online internet and social media) to improve customer contact and reduce production risk. This solution was developed for the digital age. This is a valuable source of innovation for the brand. Higher Education eBrand Equity is Predominantly Based on OISM-based Interactivity to Communicate Its Brand Messages to Candidates and Students. This activity produces a substantial marketing asset that may be used in future marketing endeavors by utilizing online engagement to establish good attitudes among students or applicants, increase brand value, and create competitive advantages. According to Keller (2010) and Nah et al. (2011), eBrand Equity generates value because it enables the management of higher education institutions to use interactive online marketing communications or to increase customer loyalty, the likelihood of selecting a particular brand, the likelihood of attracting new customers, and the likelihood of having an extension. In addition, Straker et al. (2016) also stated that eBrand Equity is the most important factor in integrating valuable information with online dialogue and interaction to make strategic decisions. Additionally, eBrand Equity is a significant component in brand building related to the relationship with the students or candidates (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016).

eBrand Equity is a multidimensional construct that is used in this research. It is comprised of brand awareness, which indicates that the students' candidates can familiarize themselves with, recall, or recognize a brand or simply know about that brand (R. Huang et al., 2012); and brand loyalty, which refers to the number of different ways in which brand loyalty manifests itself in day-to-day student behavior (Keller, 2010). Additionally, according to Pinar et al. (2014), building and validating eBrand Equity constructs might produce the core values of higher education. These core values include brand association, perceived quality, trust, higher education reputation, learning environment, and emotional environment. These core values could be created by developing and validating eBrand Equity constructs.

3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 eSERVQUAL to Attitude toward Behaviour

Researchers have identified criteria for evaluating the quality and efficacy of electronic services. In Davis (1989)'s Opinion, the vast literature on measuring electronic service quality and customer adoption of new technology is examined. Other researchers have examined the impact of electronic service quality on customer intent and behavior (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Zeithaml et al., 2002). This study analyzes the relevant theories by examining the relationship between electronic service quality, consumer satisfaction, and intent to purchase.

Jiang et al. (2016) discovered a correlation between the qualitative dimensions of electronic service and customer satisfaction. Dimensions of electronic service quality

include maintenance, dependability, product portfolio, usability, and security. The most important of these five factors is usability, followed by maintenance, product portfolio, dependability, and security. According to [Y.-F. Kuo et al. \(2009\)](#), student satisfaction is based on benefits, money, quality, and social value. Consequently, when evaluating online platforms, students compare the costs incurred and the benefits received.

Numerous researchers measure the efficacy of electronic services using e-SERVQUAL. It originated from research on the effectiveness of electronic services in higher education. For instance, [Kim-Soon et al. \(2014\)](#) studied electronic service quality at a Malaysian university. They discover a correlation between the frequency of electronic service use on academic websites and the quality of electronic services that support learning, research, and communication.

[Cobelli et al. \(2019\)](#) discovered a positive correlation between the quality of electronic and career counseling services and students' attitudes. [Pearson et al. \(2012\)](#) also report a significant relationship between electronic service quality and behavioral attitudes. [Kim-Soon et al. \(2014\)](#) suggested that a student's attitude toward a behavior is crucial for developing long-lasting and enduring relationships with higher education. [Alzoubi \(2019\)](#) found a significant relationship between electronic service quality and attitudes regarding the conduct of Jordanian higher education students. Based on these explanations, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: eSERVQUAL significantly influences Attitude toward Behaviour.

3.2 eWOM Reference to Subjective Norm

An eWOM reference is either a positive or negative statement made by a customer candidate, current customer, or former customer about a product or company that is beneficial for many people and institutions via the internet ([Marchand et al., 2017](#)). eWOM is significant in influencing subjective norms because, in the digital age, other people's opinions significantly impact an individual's attitude and decisions regarding his behavior. Reference, including its electronic form, is crucial for customer candidates' decision-making ([Chevalier et al., 2006](#)).

It is a general form of eWOM ([Chatterjee, 2001](#)). Reference can evaluate and rate the subjects created by customers who have access. According to the theory of information adoption, consumers modify their behavior based on online review recommendations ([Filieri et al., 2014](#)). Consequently, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

H2: eWOM Reference significantly influences Subjective Norm.

3.3 Higher education: eBrand Equity to Perceived Behaviour Control

[Lin \(2008\)](#) discovered that brand image, representing brand equity value, indirectly influences purchase behavior via TPB decomposition. On the other hand, according to

Baldauf et al. (2003), the dimensions of brand equity (brand awareness), Brand association, brand perceived quality, and brand loyalty have an indirect but significant effect on purchase intention. Still, the consumers' value must mediate it. They believed that brand awareness and behavioral intention were positively correlated.

Mosavi et al. (2012) discovered that 26% of 860 online shoppers made purchases due to perceived behavior control influenced by brand equity, and 27% made purchases due to the influence of subjective norms in internet purchasing. In the context of a well-known brand, J. Huang et al. (2008) found that brand awareness is the most crucial antecedent of perceived behavior control. Barker et al. (2009) discovered a correlation between perceived behavior control and a powerful brand. In other words, e-brand equity could be the primary determinant of behavior control perception. Lee et al. (2009) postulated that loyal youthful consumers in Australia and Singapore could impact perceived behavior control. So, the recommended hypothesis for this study is as follows:

H3: Higher Education eBrand Equity Has a significant effect on Perceived Behavioural Control

3.4 Attitude toward Behaviour toward Higher Education Choice Behaviour

Fishbein et al. (2011)'s literature review states that an attitude is a psychological disposition conveyed through a favorable or unfavorable evaluation. Generally, the more favorable an individual's attitude toward a particular behavior, the greater the likelihood they will engage in that behavior. Numerous previous researchers employing the TPB model in funding service contexts have demonstrated that an individual's attitude is a crucial predictor of their intention and actualization (Alam et al., 2012; Amin, 2012; Echchabi et al., 2012). The authors propose the following hypothesis in light of this explanation.

H4: Attitude toward Behaviour significantly influences Higher Education Choice Behaviour

3.5 Subjective Norm to Higher Education Choice Behaviour

According to Fishbein et al. (2011), subjective norms are perceived social pressure to perform or refrain from performing a behavior. This indicates that an individual considers a specific expectation regarding the perception of others to be essential to their participation in a particular behavior. Amin et al. (2011), and Echchabi et al. (2012), to name a few, have demonstrated that the subjective norm is an important predictor of an individual's next realizable intention. Consequently, the following hypothesis must be presented:

H5: Subjective Norm significantly influences Higher Education Choice Behaviour

3.6 Perceived Behavioural Control over Higher Education Choice Behaviour

Identical to attitude toward behavior, perceived behavior control can be accessed via control belief. Control conviction, an individual's subjective probability, can facilitate or hinder the situation's willingness. Each control belief can contribute to the perception of control over behavior and its performance (Ajzen, 2020). Sapingi et al. (2011), Saad et al. (2010), and Rutherford et al. (2009) found that perceived behavior control has a significant impact on behavior in the context of financial services.

In the context of choice behavior in private higher education, the choice behavior of higher education will exist when the individual's belief in the brand value of the higher education is strong, indicating that perceived behavior control can substantially impact choice behavior toward private higher education. Therefore, the following is the proposed hypothesis for this study:

H6: Perceived Behavioural Control significantly affects Higher Education Choice Behaviour

Therefore, this research framework can be seen in Figure 2 below.

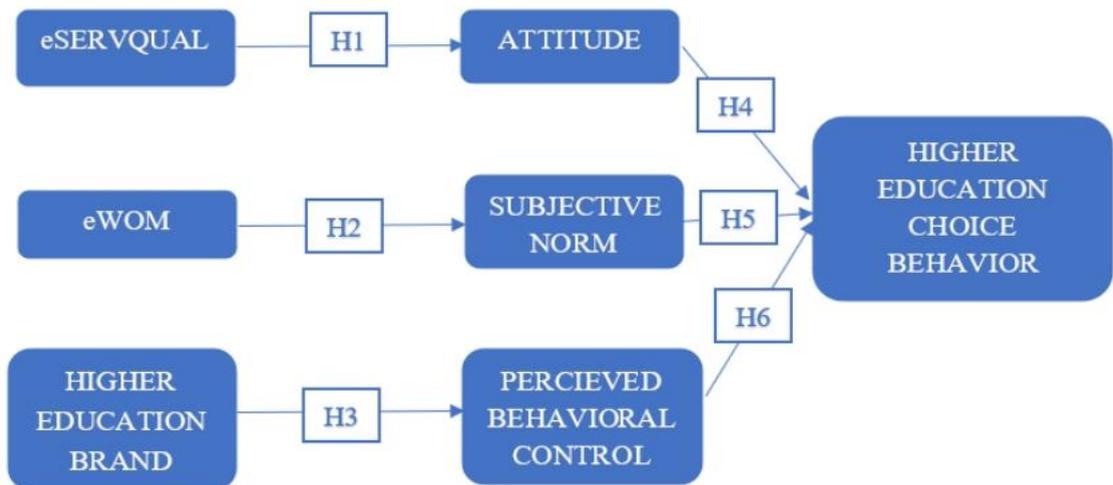


Figure 2. Research Framework

4. METHOD

This study tests hypotheses derived from the theory using a quantitative method and a causal research design. Google Forms distributed questionnaires to respondents in various private Indonesian higher education institutions.

This population comprises all Indonesian private higher education students. Based on a higher education database, there were 4,347,994 private higher education pupils in Indonesia during the last three years (2020, 2021, and 2022) (Statistics of Higher

Education, 2020). Due to the vast population size, this study determines the population to target.

According to [Kannan \(2017\)](#), obtaining a suitable model would be simpler with more samples. Therefore, samples would be determined based on the minimum sample size estimation results. $(\text{Number of indicators plus the number of latent variables}) \times (5 \text{ to } 10)$ is the minimal sample size requirement for structural equation modeling (SEM). Based on this formula, the minimum sample size for this study would be $(27+4) \times 5 = 155$ or $(27+ 4) \times 10 = 310$, but this study employed 505 usable data points for SEM analysis.

The samples for this study were collected using non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling technique. [Neuman \(2013\)](#) explains that sampling units with desirable characteristics in purposive sampling are selected based on a specific factor. After determining the population target, representative purposive sampling criteria are determined, particularly for criteria of higher education website electronic service and electronic equity of higher education brand names. The author considers the following sample criteria: 1) Students are from private higher education who used an official website to apply to private universities; 2) Students have been in private higher education in Indonesia for the past two years (2022 for semester 3 and 2023 for semester 1), were still using website universities at the time of the survey, and were registered as active students in private higher education that was awarded "Excellent and or Superior Accreditation" by the National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education.

The questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "totally not agree" to 5 = "totally agree." Based on a study by [Chang et al. \(2009\)](#), the first variable is electronic service quality (eSERVQUAL), where electronic service quality dimensions are operated as reflective types. Four dimensions comprise the electronic service quality measurement: website design, customer service, security and privacy, and fulfillment. The second variable, eWOM reference, refers to a modified version of measurement by [Mahrinasari et al. \(2017\)](#) that focuses on the higher education selection scheme. The third and fourth variables, attitude toward behavior and subjective norm, are derived from [Pujadas-Hostench et al. \(2019\)](#)'s dimensions. Adopted by [Pinar et al. \(2014\)](#), eBrand Equity is a measurement in higher education. Higher Education Choice Behaviour Measurement adopted [Hsu et al. \(2012\)](#)'s measurement. The AMOS 26 statistics software version was utilized for structural equation modeling (SEM) data analysis.

5. RESULT

Google Forms collected 520 questionnaire responses using 520 forms. However, fifteen of them are invalid and cannot be processed. The remaining 505, or 97.16

percent, are valid and can be processed. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the respondents in this study.

Table 1 Respondents Profile

Characteristics	Description	Quantity	Percentage
Sex	Male	343	67.92
	Female	162	32.08
Academic year	2023, Semester 1	192	38.02
	2022, Semester 3	313	61.98
High school origin	Senior high school	334	66.14
	Senior vocational school	81	16.04
	Islamic senior high school	90	17.82
Age	17 – 19 years	389	77.03
	20-23 years	81	16.04
	23-25 years	35	6.93
Visited Website University Last Year	< 12 Months	192	38,02
	More than 12 Months	313	61,98

5.1 The Goodness of Fit Measurement Model

Before the model testing results for Goodness of Fit Measurement, validity and reliability tests of the indicator's measurement were conducted using convergence validity measured by average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's alpha for reliability. All indicators met the loading factor AVE score requirement of greater than 0.50, and the Cronbach Alpha reliability test demonstrates that all indicators are reliable, meeting the requirement of a Cronbach Alpha score of greater than 0.70. The results of the fit measurement model can be determined using the set of criteria presented in Table 2. The goodness of fit measurement model demonstrates that the model is appropriate (Table 2).

Table 2. Goodness of Fit Management Model

The goodness of Fit Indexes	Recommended Value	Measurement Results	Conclusion Criteria
Chi-square (χ^2)/CMIN	Lesser than the expectation	919.164	Fit
CMIN/Df	$2 \leq \text{Normed } \chi^2 \leq 5$	1.792	Fit
GOF	≥ 0.90	0.901	Fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.041	Fit
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.963	Fit
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.957	Fit
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.920	Fit

5.2 Structural Model Results

Using the AMOS 26 application, the results of the structural model to assess the accepted or rejected hypothesis indicate that the two hypotheses, the effect of eWOM on the subjective norm and the subjective norm effect on higher education choice behavior, are either dismissed or not significant.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Direct Effect		Estimate	S.E	C.R	P	Conclusion Results
H1	eSERVQUAL	Attitude	0.984	0.082	11.928	***	Significant
H2	eWOM	Subjective Norm	0.051	0.060	0.847	0.38	Not Significant
H3	eBrand Equity	Perceived Behaviour Control	0.861	0.062	13.799	***	Significant
H4	Attitude	Higher Education Choice Behaviour	0.487	0.106	4.577	***	Significant
H5	Subjective Norm	Higher Education Choice Behaviour	0.129	0.141	0.914	0.36	Not Significant
H6	Perceived Behaviour Control	Higher Education Choice Behaviour	0.606	0.096	6.285	***	Significant

The output result shows that eSERVQUAL positively and significantly influences attitude toward behavior, as determined by a significant score of 0.000 (less than alpha 5%), with a parameter coefficient of 9.84%. Also, the hypotheses H3, H4, and H6 are significantly accepted. This means that e-brand equity has a significant effect on perceived behavior control. Attitude and perceived behavior control significantly affect higher education choice behavior. Exception: the eWOM impact on the subjective norm and the subjective norm effect on higher education choice behavior do not have a significant impact.

Additionally, the structural model results (Table 4) show that Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behaviour Control can have a mediating role on each antecedent effect of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behaviour Control toward Higher Education Choice Behaviour, as stated by Baron et al. (1986). The mediating role score can be calculated based on the formula of Baron et al. (1986), that is, *variance*

accountant for value (VAF):
$$\text{VAF} = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}} \Rightarrow \text{VAF} = \frac{a*b}{ab+c}$$

The research findings (Table 4) indicate that attitude and perceived behavior control mediate the effect of eSERVQUAL and brand equity on higher education selection behavior.

Table 4. The Mediating Role of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behaviour Control

Path	Path			The Mediating Value			Conclusion Criteria
	A	b	C	a*b	ab+c	a*b/(ab+c)	
eSERVQUAL > Attitude > Higher Education Choice	0.984	0.487	0.853	0.479	1,332	0.36	Partial Mediation
eWOM > Subjective Norm > Higher Education Choice	Not Significant	Not Significant	0.613	X	X	X	No Mediation
Higher Education eBrand equity> Perceived Behaviour Control > Higher Education Choice	0.861	0.606	0.919	0.522	1.441	0.36	Partial Mediation

These findings support the findings of [Ayeh et al. \(2013\)](#) and [De Leeuw et al. \(2015\)](#), despite the varied settings of the objects. [Tsai et al. \(2010\)](#) discovered that perceived behavior control mediates the effect of searching for information skills when selecting colleges. However, this study's findings regarding the mediating effect of subjective norms do not corroborate the results of previous studies. According to [Hampson et al. \(2006\)](#) and [B. C. Kuo et al. \(2015\)](#), the subjective standard also plays a mediating function about various objects. [Hampson et al. \(2006\)](#) discovered that the subjective standard moderates the intention to consume intoxicating beverages in elementary schools. [B. C. Kuo et al. \(2015\)](#) found that subjective standards moderate immigrant counseling intentions significantly.

6. DISCUSSION

This research verifies prior research. However, that research had a limitation in that it did not employ the TPB construct on behavior building in choosing higher education in today's digital world, particularly in developing nations like Indonesia. This research addresses this issue. Using eSERVQUAL and eWOM reference and eBrand Equity constructs as predictors for attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control in a robust TPB framework that is empirically tested, this research succeeds in developing a student behavior model related to higher education choice.

According to the study's findings, eSERVQUAL considerably impacts individuals' attitudes toward their behaviors (98.4%). It indicates that the higher the eSERVQUAL, the higher the percentage of applicants for or current students who would use eSERVQUAL based on the website for higher education. Because of the great quality of service provided by the website for higher education, more and more individuals will use the website and ultimately choose the higher education institution. When it comes to boosting a student's perspective in selecting higher education institutions, the quality of the website design is by far the most significant influence. Customers may develop more favorable opinions toward utilizing the websites of higher education institutions if those websites are well-designed and presented appealingly. When students engage with the website of an institution of higher education, the characteristics of the website's design quality, system quality, security quality, and service quality all have a beneficial influence on the students' behavior about selecting the institution of higher education. The ease of use as an indicator of system quality is the most prominent and major stimulant among these four dimensions. Ease of use is the most significant stimulant in maintenance, product portfolio, reliability, and security.

This finding lends credence to the conclusions reached by [Zeithaml et al. \(2002\)](#) and [Parasuraman et al. \(2005\)](#) in their research on how the quality of electronic service influences a customer's level of satisfaction and their propensity to make future purchases. In those studies, the researchers investigated the correlations between electronic service quality levels, customer satisfaction, and future purchasing

intentions. The findings of [Pearson et al. \(2012\)](#), which demonstrate a correlation between the quality of electronic service and an attitude toward behavior, are also supported by this information. According to [Kim-Soon et al. \(2014\)](#), students' attitudes regarding behavior variables are crucial for developing long-term and continuous partnerships with higher education institutions. According to the findings of [Alzoubi \(2019\)](#), electronic service quality has a considerable influence on the attitude of higher education students in Jordan regarding their behavior.

This study lends credence to previous research conducted by [Al Khayyal et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Jiang et al. \(2016\)](#), which discovered that eSERVQUAL dimensions had a substantial effect on consumers' attitudes. According to [Cobelli et al. \(2019\)](#) findings, eSERVQUAL has a favorable impact on students' attitudes. According to [Pearson et al. \(2012\)](#), eSERVQUAL has a considerable effect on attitude. Meanwhile, according to [Kim-Soon et al. \(2014\)](#), the attitude toward behavior is the most important measurement for constructing a long-term sustainability relationship between students and higher education institutions.

In addition, the findings of this research provide recommendations for higher education institutions to manage their websites by prioritizing design quality, information quality, security, and service because measurement results on these dimensions yield poor scores. These recommendations were made possible by the findings of this research. In the meantime, as compared to the influence that eBrand Equity Value has on perceived behavior control (86.10%), eSERQUAL has a significantly higher value of the significant effect (98.4%) to affect attitude. It is anticipated that eSERVQUAL will develop in these four areas so that students and student candidates will have a greater level of trust in the system, increasing higher education. As a direct con, it will lead to improved decision behavior, particularly among private colleges and institutes of higher education.

Students' behaviors have changed as a result of the advancements made in higher education during the digital age. When it comes to the findings of the studies conducted by [Bhattacharjee \(2000\)](#), [Zolait et al. \(2008\)](#), and [Zolait et al. \(2009\)](#), the pupils will place their faith in the references to eWOM that their parents or friends provide. They discovered that eWOM references have a considerable impact on the subjective norms of individuals.

Despite this, the findings of this research indicate that referrals to eWOM do not significantly impact subjective norms. This suggests that the students' candidates do not put their faith in the references provided by other individuals on the internet or on social media. EWOM references are unnecessary when considering the students' point of view. Students can obtain information directly from the websites of educational institutions of higher education or universities, provided that the material is complete. The website can be accessed in a short amount of time, and the quality of the design of the website, as well as the system website, the security website, and the service quality

website that make up eSERVQUAL, are all good. This assertion is consistent with the findings of the eSERVEQUAL study project (the most significant influence on developing attitude was 98.4%, which, as a result, brought about a higher effect on higher education choice behavior). Therefore it is appropriate to make such a remark.

In addition, the outcomes of this research do not support the conclusions of the research that was conducted by Rölle (2017), Filieri et al. (2014), and Cheung et al. (2008). In the context of Business Platform Online, they used information adoption theory, which postulates that customers adjust their behavior to conform to the recommendations made in online evaluations. However, students do not require eWOM references in their educational settings at higher education institutions. The value of the higher education e-brand equity effect toward perceived behavioral control is 86.10%, which indicates that the effect is significant. This research result shows that eBrand Equity in Higher Education has substantial brand value due to strengthening brand awareness, brand association, brand perceived quality, brand loyalty, trust in the brand, higher education reputation, and the learning and emotional environment of higher education. This encouraging behavior causes a shift in the decision regarding which colleges or higher education institutions to attend. This study supports the conclusions drawn by Girard et al. (2021) and Mosavi et al. (2012) from their respective bodies of research, which state that branding impacts the effect of perceived behavior control on purchase behavior in Internet buying.

Additionally, the findings of this study lend credence to the viewpoints expressed by (J. Huang et al., 2008) and Barker et al. (2009). According to J. Huang et al. (2008), brand awareness is the factor that comes before perceived behavior control in well-known brand behavior. Barker et al. (2009) discovered that a strong brand value significantly impacts the women's samples' perception of their ability to manage their behavior. In other words, strong eBrand Equity values are the primary factor determining perceived behavior control, especially for private higher education. It indicates that students will select higher education as a comfortable and safe learning location due to the strong brand equity values of higher education institutions or universities. Higher education is seen as the best place to acquire knowledge.

The estimated values of attitude toward behavior and perceived behavior control positively impact higher education choice behavior. On the other hand, the estimated value of eWOM references has a negative importance on higher education choice behavior, with a value of 12.9%. Because these findings primarily support the positive opinions of higher education students regarding the higher quality of information facilities on university websites, it is clear that a positive attitude and a perception of being in control of one's behavior will induce a student's perspective to choose or apply to higher education institutions or universities. In addition, there is a strong perceived behavior control on the part of the students to consistently access the websites of higher education institutions to acquire all of the relevant information. This statement fits very well with the TPB model because, as Ajzen et al. (1992) explains, a positive

attitude is developed when psychological tendencies are represented through appraisal. The students' perspectives on their engagement in behavior are positively correlated with the degree to which they have a positive attitude toward behavior. The TPB model was improved because of the findings of this research. The most noteworthy finding from this study is that it corroborates the findings of [Arora et al. \(2017\)](#), [Amin et al. \(2011\)](#), [Amin \(2012\)](#), [Syed et al. \(2012\)](#), and [Echchabi et al. \(2012\)](#), which state that a person's attitude is the most crucial factor in determining how they would behave.

This finding from the research is different from those found in other studies, particularly regarding to the effect of subjective norms on the behavior of choosing higher education. Following the findings of the study conducted by [Moriano et al. \(2012\)](#) and ([Karimi et al., 2016](#)); [Karimi et al. \(2014\)](#), this indicates that the decision of the students to pick or apply to higher education institutions is based on individual consideration rather than considering the societal norm. They concluded that subjective norms are not reliable indicators of behavior. According to [Ajzen et al. \(1992\)](#), subjective norms evaluate social pressure to behave. According to this research, the social pressure exerted by eWOM references, such as those provided by family and friends, does not significantly alter the perspective choosing behavior of students attending higher education institutions. The additional information results demonstrate that eWOM references from other individuals have had a negligible impact on the websites of educational institutions, whether to look up information about universities or apply to educational institutions or universities.

Because the profile number of the research samples is young, primarily members of the I or Z generation (17–25 years old), also known as "everything by using the Internet online," attitude and perceived behavior control the student's perspective in deciding whether or not to apply to higher education institutions. These factors are primarily determined by trust and self-competence to access accurate information about higher education. This causes the I or Z generations to prefer to conduct the transaction using morse code. In conclusion, the finding of this research demonstrates that the student's perspective has not considered subjective norms as a component in recent years while making decisions regarding the behavior associated with their choice of higher education. Students decide to apply to or select higher education based on their attitude and perceived level of behavioral control. This allows students to access higher education services more readily and strengthens the strong brand values of higher education institutions or universities.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Indonesia's research on higher education options is still very limited. Therefore, researchers should investigate it further. This study has several limitations that future researchers should address. First, behavior modification is a complex phenomenon for which researchers should, in the future, expand the scope of their studies in public

higher education and the context of social media. This study centered on eSERQUAL, eWOM references, and eBrand Equity in the context of the Internet (higher education institution websites). Second, eWOM references can act as a moderating variable in the relationship between subjective norms and choice behavior. This will extend the TPB Model by investigating the moderating variable of eWOM references, demonstrating that eWOM references do not affect subjective norms. It implies that eWOM references are ineffective. According to Molina et al. (2022), there are two types of eWOM (weak and robust eWOM references), so future research should focus on eWOM references as the moderating variable.

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