

# The Impact of Education Service Quality on the Long-Term Relationship

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## Abstract

Implementation of the marketing policy of education services should be able to guarantee the achievement of long-term success. Identification information can be obtained by investigating the possibility of long-term relations between students and higher education institutions, through the disclosure of soft and hard quality of service delivered by institutions and their possible impact on trust, commitment and loyalty of students. The study was conducted involving a sample of 369 student majors in a private college in Yogyakarta. Samples were obtained through convenience sampling technique-quota. The research data were analyzed using structural equation modeling approach (SEM) and a data processing program AMOS 18.0. The results proved that trust and commitment of students are able to mediate the importance of delivering quality services of soft and hard to build student loyalty.

## Introduction

Research in the field of service quality suggests an important development since Parasuraman et al. (1) proposed a conceptual model of service quality. They argue that the level of service quality can be determined based on one or a combination of 5 gap (difference) ratings, both derived from the assessment of consumers and marketers (companies). During its development, among the 5 gaps, the fifth gap which shows a comparison of the expected consumer valuation service to the consumer perception of services obtained and used as the conceptual basis of research services. Conceptual model with the fifth gap approach is then applied by Parasuraman et al. (2) in his research, as well as a basic inspiration by subsequent researchers.

In addition to the model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1, 2), the other researchers also found that service quality is divided into only two dimensions - the quality of soft and hard services (3). Driver and Johnston (3) said that the quality of soft service is naturally interpersonal or technical, while the quality of hard service leads to over interpersonal or non-functional quality of service. Furthermore they divide the soft service quality consists of 7 attributes related to interpersonal aspects of the delivery of services: attention / helper, caring, commitment, communication, respect, flexibility, and familiarity. The quality of hard service in the form of 11 non-interpersonal aspects, including access, esthetic, availability, cleanliness /

tidiness, comfort, capacity, usability, integrity, reliability, and security. The results of their empirical research shows that on average 41% of customers prefer the quality of soft service, 39% prefer the quality of hard service, while 19.5% of customers consider both attributes are equally important in the context of service delivery to them.

Furthermore Auh (4) states that the quality of soft services can strengthen the quality of hard service. Both the quality of services can also influence consumer loyalty through a mediator variable / between (mediating / intervening) trust. In addition, service quality can also affect the confidence and loyalty of consumers (5). The need to maintain customer loyalty is more important than trying to acquire new customers. By maintaining customer loyalty, the organization will gain promotion expenses efficiency and other expenses for attracting customers (6). Similarly, the customer loyalty is also important in the case of higher education.

This study aimed to understand the quality of services and the variables related to student loyalty realizing that student loyalty is a key target for Colleges in order to sustain their existence. The study is expected to provide an overview of the important factors needed to create student loyalty and to help private colleges identifying their resources, which in turn, to able to manage their resources optimally. As the result, the existed private colleges can run their activities effectively.

## **Theoretical Reviews and Hypothesis**

In this section we describe the characteristics of variables used to construct a conceptual model of research. These are: loyalty, the quality of soft and hard services, trust, and commitment. This section also describes the relationship between these variables into a framework (model) studies.

### ***Loyalty***

One important aspect for long-term relationship is the existence of customer loyalty. Loyalty is defined as a positive attitude to make repeat purchases on a specific brand; a situation when repeat purchase behavior is accompanied by a psychological confidence (5). Meanwhile, according to Auh (4) loyalty may be defined as willingness to make repeat purchases and remain willing to make repeat purchases, despite the presence of higher prices. Further Wong and Sohal (5) stated that customer loyalty is related to the possibility to restore, do business and to improve communication by publicity and reference.

### ***Soft and Hard Quality of Service***

According to Wong and Sohal (5), the quality of service becomes a differentiator and a strong competitive tool that can be owned by a reputable organization. According to them, consumers tend to quickly evaluate different dimensions of a service, a separate form of overall service quality. Therefore, in the context of the organization of competition, quality of service determines the ability to maintain and expand customer loyalty. Delivery of high quality services to customers will form their loyalty.

Quality of service can be divided into quality service with quality soft and hard services (3, 4). Quality of soft service consists of seven aspects of the interpersonal, including the attention / helper, caring, commitment, communication, respect, flexibility, and familiarity. While the quality of hard service in the form of 11 non-interpersonal aspects, including access, esthetics, availability, cleanliness / tidiness, comfort, capacity, usability, integrity, reliability, and security, and responsiveness

Some research suggests that service quality can be a positive influence on consumer trust and loyalty (5). While Jih et al. (7) stated that service quality has a positive effect on trust, and commitment. Furthermore Auh (4) states that quality of soft service has a positive effect on quality of hard services, while the quality of hard service has a positive effect of consumer trust and loyalty.

Based on the abovementioned discussion, the research hypotheses are presented as follows:

*H1: soft service quality has a positive effect on hard quality of services*

*H2: soft service quality has a positive effect on student confidence*

*H3: soft service quality has a positive effect on student commitment*

*H4: soft service quality has a positive effect on student loyalty*

*H5: hard service quality has a positive effect on student confidence*

*H6: hard service quality has a positive effect on student commitment*

*H7: hard service quality has a positive effect on student loyalty*

### **Confidence**

Trust is the basis for the vulnerability involving the construction and sacrifice (8). Sustainable competitive advantage in the global economy increasingly requires the company to become a trusted participant in various networking or groups of strategic alliances. Relationship marketing that occurred over the years become an exciting area of marketing that focuses on building long term relationships with customers and other parties. Trust emerged as a form of belief of one of the parties to the exchange partners. That belief is based on the existence of adequate reliability and integrity of its partners (9), such as: between the buyer and seller, the customer with a service provider (10), or between a manufacturer and a distributor (11). Confidence can also be caused by the presence of hope and a willingness to rely on the promise of another party (5).

Trust is positively associated with loyalty, especially when the process is not standardized, and certain services, which are susceptible to the level of risk and uncertainty of service vulnerability. These factors associated with quality of service and that contribute to the development of trust, and confidence began to grow as a positive experience at the customer service interaction, particularly when receiving the benefits of personal interaction (5).

The ability of each partner to deliver positive results to determine the commitment to engage, that when the trust along with the reliability and integrity of the partners (11). According to Omar et al. (10) trust as a precursor of commitment because people cannot do anything unless the trust that has been held. The conclusion of their study findings reinforce Wong and Sohal (5) and Jih et al. (7) which states that the trust has a positive effect on commitment. Based on these explanations, then the research hypothesis to be formulated:

*H8: the trust has a positive effect on commitment*

Relationships with partners should be developed in trust and a greater reliance, as experience from time to time and a long history of mutual interaction among relational partners to foster trust (8). Therefore, consumer trust is another key element for the providers to be able to maintain long-term relationship (12). Their opinion is corroborated by research findings from Paparoidamis and Caceres (11) which suggests that trust has a positive effect on loyalty, including a recommendation by oral communications (word-of-mouth recommendation, WOM) (9). Therefore, the proposed research hypotheses are:

*H9: the trust has a positive effect on loyalty*

### **Commitment**

Commitment is an enduring desire to continue the customer relationship and they volunteered attempting to defend it, so the implicit and explicit commitment to guarantee the continuity can be relational (10). Meanwhile, according to Dagger and O'Brien (8), commitment reflects consumer's willingness volunteering to stay and to make efforts maintaining the relationship. Commitment encourages the parties rejecting the exchange for only short-term benefit, but support long-term benefit expectations in a relationship. Caceres and Paparoidamis (11)' study states that the relationship commitment occurs when partners believe that the relationship is important enough to warrant maximum efforts in maintaining long term relationships. Relationship commitment is as a form of desire surviving to keep the need for respected relationships. Therefore, this commitment is also demonstrated long-term orientation towards customer business relationships (9).

repeat purchases and, because the relationship of performance is critical to the decision to buy back and exchange relational, loyalty, commitment to relationship-related business. Commitment and loyalty are two related but different concepts. In addition Chenet et al. (9) also states that committed customers have a relationship of proximity, which whole time can increase client loyalty. Encourage commitment on loyalty attitudes, interests and behavior referrals, direct oral communication (WOM), and willingness to recommend. Dagger and O'Brien (8)' findings prove that the commitment has a positive effect on customer loyalty. Basing on the above discussion, this study proposes the formulation of hypotheses as follows:

*H10: commitment to a positive effect on loyalty*

### **Research Framework**

Based on theoretical studies and hypotheses, it can be made into the research framework as shown in Figure 1.

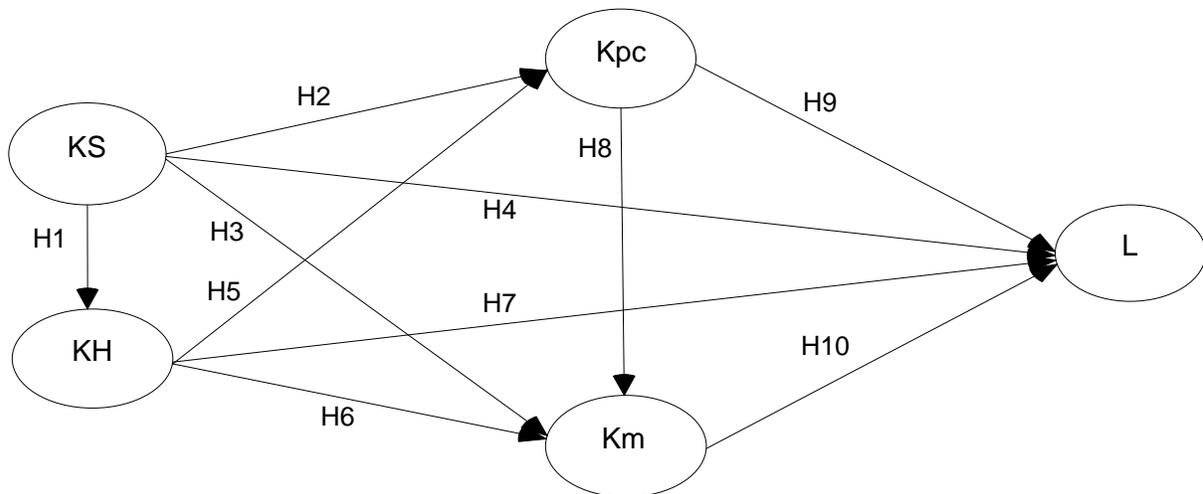


Figure 1: Framework of Study

Figure 1 shows the positive effect of a variable to another variable, which is preceded by the variable quality of educational services. The quality of the services are in divided into two, namely the quality of soft services (KS) and quality of service hard (KH). KS but positive effect on KH, together with the KH is also a positive effect on trust (KPC), commitment (Km) and loyalty (L). While the KPC will have a positive effect on Km and L. Finally Km could be positively related to L.

The study population included students at first to fourth semester in one private university (PTS) in Special Region of Yogyakarta. The data were collected using closed questionnaire, which contains points of a statement for the five research variables, as shown in the construct in Figure 1. Statement of soft service quality (KS) was adopted from 7 indicator of Driver and Johnston's study (2001). However, because the source of messenger services can be composed of college faculty and staff, the overall indicator of this study into 14 points. A statement on the variable of hard service quality (KH) also adopted based on 11 indicators of research relevant to Driver and Johnston (2001).

While the variables of trust (KPC) consists of 4 items indicator which is a modified statement of the items referred to in the Wong and Sohal's study (2002). Statement of commitment to student (Km) is based on a 3 point indicator, as a modification of a statement of research Wong and Sohal (2006, 2002). Finally, the statement of student loyalty variable (L) was adopted from the 5 points between the statement of the research data and Mazzarol Brown (2009). Overall the number of grains of statements to obtain data of this study were as many as 37 points. While the statement is provided for each item five responses are ranging from strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree response (score 5).

Before being used for research analysis, data obtained from the questionnaires have to go through the procedure of data validity and reliability testing. Approach to confirmatory testing using factor analysis (CFA) and the application program AMOS 18.0. Data is valid if the standardized factor loading for each indicator variable of at least 0.50, while the construct was said to be reliable if the value of the minimum construct reliability of 0.70 (Ghozali, 2008).

Testing procedures are also used two test events, namely the partial test and KH KS variables as exogenous (antecedents) and the variables of KPC, Km and L as the endogenous variables are tested simultaneously.

Testing on the variable KS shows the calculation results with the SEM values are in compliance with the general provisions of the critical value of the existing model fit ( $\chi^2 = 50.019$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.966; AGFI = 0.928; TLI = 0.961, and RMSEA = 0.073). Model fit as a result of modification of the model variables KS, because of the indicators point to invalid or does not meet the critical value of the model fit.

The value of GFI, AGFI and TLI modifications of the calculated variables can be obtained by KS 0966, 0928, and 0961 have met the minimum requirements of 0.90, whereas the calculated value of RMSEA of 0073 has met the requirements under 0:08. The value of Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) is still large (50 019) and the calculated probability for 0000 show that the input covariance matrix between the model predictions with observational data are significantly different. In this condition the results of model calculations are generally not well expressed (fit), because ideally the value of  $\chi^2$  is small and the probability is less than 0.05. But according to Ghozali (2008)  $\chi^2$  value is very sensitive to sample a lot, and there is a tendency of the value of  $\chi^2$  will always be significant. Therefore, the condition of a large sample, as in this study with a sample size of 369, then the value of  $\chi^2$  and the probability is negligible and it is recommended to take better advantage of using a measure of model fit another. Since in this calculation the

value of GFI, AGFI, TLI, and RMSEA has met the recommended criteria, the research model in this calculation can be declared fit.

The final results of testing the validity of the model fit KS variables indicate for each indicator of teacher quality assessment of soft services (7 points) and employees (7 points) there is a teacher assessment indicators and 7 are valid indicators of employee appraisal. For variable KH, testing shows the critical value of the model fit to the values of  $\chi^2 = 97.091$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.949; AGFI = 0.913; TLI = 0.944, and RMSEA = 0.074. The test results fit a model of indicators suggests that the assessment of 11 indicators KH statement, only one (H1) indicators shall be declared invalid.

Meanwhile, the three endogenous variables (KPC, Km, and L) obtained a model fit for the critical value  $\chi^2 = 100.328$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.953; AGFI = 0.906; TLI = 0.950, and RMSEA = 0.074. Modified model fit indicates there is only one indicator of the loyalty variable (L5) of the five indicators that have declared invalid, while the indicators variables and Km entirely KPC produces a valid condition.

Testing the reliability of each variable is based only on the items above statements are valid. The reliability testing process generates construct reliability value of 0.70. Because it can be stated that each variable is represented by grains of a valid statement is reliable (reliably).

Basing on these explanations, it can be concluded that the statements point to KS1 to KS6, KH1, and L5 declared invalid, while other items expressed as a valid statement items as well as reliable. For the valid points that can be used as a basis for further analysis.

### Research Results

Tests on ten hypotheses were done using a structural equation model (SEM = structural equation modeling) and application program AMOS 18.0. Summary of results of calculations are presented in Figure 2.

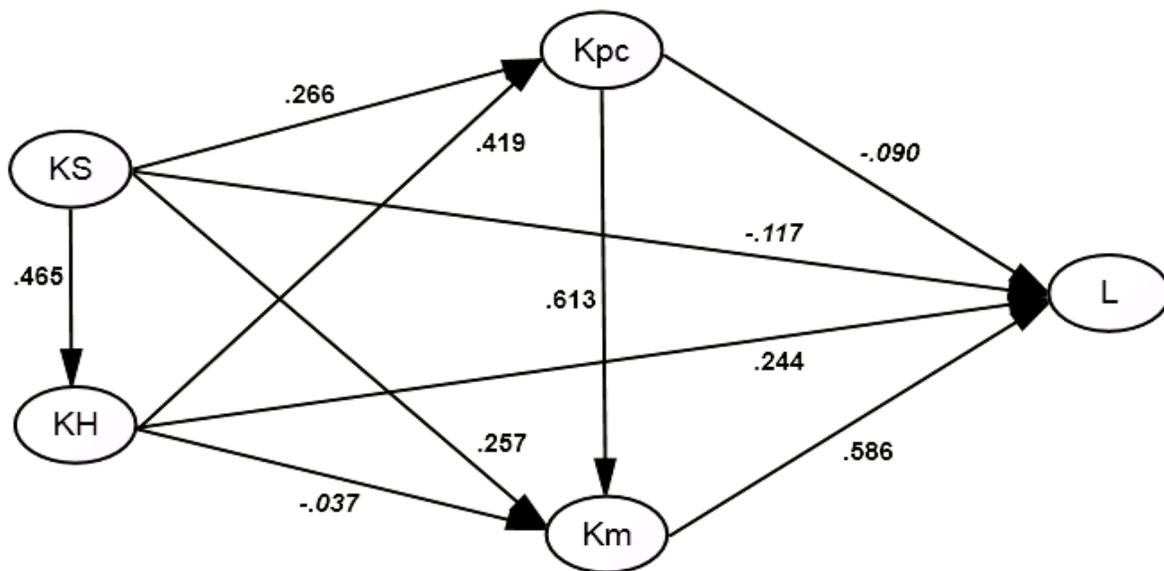


Figure 2: Research result

Research model in Figure 2 shows the calculated SEM with values that meet the general provisions of the existing critical value, ie  $X^2 = 543.236$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.912; AGFI = 0.886; TLI = 0.955, and RMSEA = 0.041. GFI and TLI values from the calculation results can be obtained for 0912 and 0955 have met the minimum requirements of 0.90, whereas the calculated value of RMSEA of 0041 has met the requirements under 0:08. Since in this calculation the value of GFI, TLI, and RMSEA has met the recommended criteria, the research model in this calculation can be declared fit.

Further testing needs to be done on each of the indicators suggest that an approach t-test. Based on the calculation of the t-test of significance can be seen that all indicator variables are able to calculate the probability value is less than 0% ( $p < 0.001$ ). That means that the variables of service quality soft, hard service quality, trust, commitment, and loyalty can be declared to have been represented by the research indicators.

In the meantime for testing related to the relationship between the variables of the study, which is basically a form of hypothesis testing, this study can be made recapitulation of the t-test calculations as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Recapitulation of Significance Calculation of Research Model

Hipotesis		Standardized estimate	P	Conclusion
H1	KS ---> KH	.465	***	Accepted
H2	KS ---> Kpc	.266	***	Accepted
H3	KS ---> Km	.257	***	Accepted
H4	KS ---> L	-.117	.080	Not Accepted
H5	KH ---> Kpc	.419	***	Accepted
H6	KH ---> Km	-.037	.531	Not Accepted
H7	KH ---> L	.244	***	Accepted
H8	Kpc ---> Km	.613	***	Accepted
H9	Kpc ---> L	-.090	.272	Not Accepted
H10	Km ---> L	.586	***	Accepted

\*\*\*: signficancy,  $p < 0.001$

The hypothesis formulated in this study a positive effect of a variable to another variable. While it can be seen from Table 1 that the t-test based approach can be obtained by two groups of conclusions, the hypothesis that proved significant and insignificant.

Hypothesis that all have shown to be significantly smaller than the probability of 0% ( $p < 0.001$ ), which consists of a hypothesis about the presence of a positive influence on soft service quality and hard service quality (H1), trust (H2) and commitment (H3), and the positive influence of hard service quality to trust (H5) and loyalty (H7), there is a positive influence of trust on commitment (H8), and also there are positive effects of commitment to student loyalty (H10). It shows that the higher the value of each of the exogenous variables (free) that there is going to make the endogenous variable (bound) increases.

Table 2 also shows that there are three hypotheses are not proven to be significant, because the count reaches the value of the probability of more than 5% ( $p > 0.05$ ). In addition, the calculation results also showed similar results, namely the negative influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The third hypothesis is not proven to positively influence the quality of soft services to loyalty (H4), the quality of hard service to influence commitment (H6) as well as the influence of trust to the loyalty of students (H9).

Based on the results of testing the hypothesis, then do the calculation of the influence of each variable (exogenous) to the other variables (endogenous), both calculations were made in total or in the form of direct and indirect effects (sets of variables). The recapitulation of the endogenous variables influence on exogenous variables is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Calculation of Effect of Exogenous Variables recapitulation of the endogenous variables

Var.	Total Influence				Direct Influence				Indirect Influence			
	KS	KH	Kpc	Km	KS	KH	Kpc	Km	KS	KH	Kpc	Km
KH	.463	---	---	---	.463	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Kpc	.459	.415	---	---	.267	.415	---	---	.192	---	---	---
Km	.514	.244	.588	---	.244	---	.588	---	.270	.244	---	---
L	.326	.295	.279	.473	---	.180	---	.473	.326	.115	.279	---

If associated with the previous analysis, Table 2 shows the large proportion of the total effect of soft service quality (KS) on quality of hard service (KH) of 0.463. The magnitude of the effect is equivalent to the total value of the direct influence of KS toward KH in the middle column. It also means that the value of all variables that may affect KH, then 46.3% positively influenced by the KS, while the remainder (53.7%) affected by other variables that are not intended or assumed to be constant in the model study of the influence.

The effect of the total KS variable to trust variable (KPC) is equal to 45.9%. This value is obtained from the sum of the proportion of the direct influence of KS against KPC for 0.267 and the proportion of indirect effect of KS of 0.192 kpc. KS indirect effect on kpc obtained from the product of the direct effect of KS on KH and KH direct influence of the KPC ( $0.463 \times 0.415 = 0.192$ ). While the magnitude of the influence of the total variable KS to commitment (Km) was 51.4%, which is obtained from the sum of the large proportion of the direct effect of KS on Km with the value of 0.244 and the proportion of indirect effect of the KS to Km was 0.270. KS indirect effect on Km can be obtained from the multiplication effect of the total KS on KPC and direct influence KPC on Km ( $0.459 \times 0.588 = 0.270$ ).

Finally, it can be seen the total effect of KS on student loyalty (L) by 32.6%. The magnitude of the effect obtained from the sum of these two groups of calculations. The first, derived from multiplying the proportion of the total effect of KS on Km and Km proportion of direct influence on loyalty ( $0.514 \times 0.473 = 0.243$ ). Second, the proportion derived from the multiplication of the direct influence of KS on KH and proportion of the direct influence of KH on L ( $0.463 \times 0.180 = 0.083$ ). By using such calculation logic in the above calculations can explain the results of the total effect of a variable to another variable of the other contents of the Table 3.

In addition to the above results of calculation 18.0 AMOS also provides information on the large proportion of the contribution of each indicator in each of the variables of the model study. Large proportion of the contribution in the context of regression analysis is often called the determinant coefficient ( $R^2$ ).  $R^2$  calculation results can be recapitulated in Table 3.

Table 3: Recapitulation determinant coefficient calculation ( $R^2$ )

Quality of Soft service		Quality of Hard service		Trust		Commitment		Loyalty	
Code	Value	Code	Value	Code	Value	Code	Value	Code	Value
KS7	.280	KH2	.348	Kpc1	.694	Km1	.811	L1	.806
KS8	.518	KH3	.459	Kpc2	.757	Km2	.580	L2	.746
KS9	.702	KH4	.279	Kpc3	.737	Km3	.361	L3	.360
KS10	.537	KH5	.365	Kpc4	.892			L4	.264
KS11	.479	KH6	.434						
KS12	.448	KH7	.555						
KS13	.491	KH8	.481						
KS14	.537	KH9	.456						
		KH10	.587						
		KH11	.441						

From Table 3 it can be seen a lot of indicators that contribute to the representation of the variable quality of soft service is KS9 and KS14, which is the visible appearance of PTS employees sympathetic to answer questions from the students and staff are always friendly when discussing administrative issues with students. While the soft service quality indicators that contribute to lower the K7 and K12, which is an indicator of the lecturers who are always friendly when discussing with students and staff are always polite when dealing with students.

Of the column hard service quality shows that indicators that were low contribution, KH2 and KH4. These indicators say that the campus always looks clean and has appropriate placement of campus facilities for the lecture. Whereas, indicators that can contribute to high

quality of hard service were KH10 and KH7. A good indicator of campus facilities to meet student needs quickly and the quality of campus facilities is able to support the lecture.

While the indicators that contribute to the representation of all the variables of trust is high and the interval is not too wide. The order of contribution are students who believe in full to the Department (Kpc4), that the Department always consider the interests of students (Kpc2), the belief that the Department has always fulfilled his promise (Kpc3), and students who believe in honesty Department adopted a policy (Kpc1).

Table 4 also informed that the variables of commitment and loyalty have contributed indicator variable with the same sequence. The order of the commitment variable is Km1 about the spirit of the students to always maintain a relationship with the Department, Km2 focused on the relationship of students with department very important subjects for students, and km3 related to the student plans to maintain good relations with the Department in the future. While the order of the variables loyalty is the willingness a student to recommend Department at the University to others (L1), recommends the Department to others (L2), assisting the Department if needed in the future (L3), and students who will be active become a member of the alumni (L4).

### **Discussion and Implications**

This study tried to reveal the positive impact the delivery of soft and hard services quality against the tendency of the factors supporting the likelihood of long-term relationship between institutions of educational services to students. The model developed in this study can largely be proven empirically. This is supported by significantly fulfillment seven of the ten hypotheses proposed hypothesis. Seven series of hypotheses are also systematically begins with soft service quality as antecedent to the loyalty factor as a general purpose expected outcomes of the services marketing policy. The hypothesis is fulfilled also refers to the formulation of the positive influence of a variable to another variable. It shows that the higher the value of each of the exogenous variables (free) that there is going to make the existence of an endogenous variable (bound) increases. In sequence can be stated that the better the actions of the PTS refers to the quality of soft and hard services will make the loyalty of students into the larger (stronger).

The study also produced findings that there are three hypotheses that proved to be significant. The third hypothesis, of course, would reduce the overall strength of the positive influence of soft and hard service quality against the loyalty of students. Partial absence directly influence of the quality of soft services to loyalty showing strong the mediating role of hard service quality, trust and commitment variables in building loyalty. That means in the daily practice of management education institutions need to consider these important factors on the three endogenous variables if you want a high achieving student loyalty. Besides, the lack of direct influence of hard service quality on commitments shows the importance of the role of trust in the mediation of the quality of services. The importance of this role is shown by the direct influence of trust in the commitment of the largest compared with other exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The explanation is not nearly as significant as indicated by the confidence in the loyalty. Conditions that indicate an important role in mediating commitment of the exogenous variables (other than hard service quality) to loyalty, especially seen from the magnitude of the influence of commitment to the loyalty which ranks the second largest after the influence of trust on the commitment.

The study also shows path of the influence of soft service quality on loyalty with the proportion of the total effect is quite large (32.6%). For research in the field of services

marketing large proportion of these effects show a strong dominance of the exogenous variables on endogenous variables. Therefore, the results of this study can be an empirical reference for practitioners, especially the management of educational institutions to implement important policies related to student loyalty, especially to examine the important aspects that make up the variables used in this study, such as the variable of soft services quality on the visible appearance of PTS employees sympathetic to answer questions from the students and staff are always friendly when discussing administrative issues with students, campus environment that always looks clean and appropriate placement of campus facilities for the lecture on the variable quality of service hard, and the direction you need establish full trust and enthusiasm to maintain a relationship to the student.

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