

Satisfied Generation Y Parents Spread Good Recommendations: Satisfaction, Service Quality, and Brand Trusts Impact on Word of Mouth in International Education

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Abstract

This article aimed 1) to determine how service quality, parent satisfaction and brand trust affects the likelihood of parents to recommend the international school to family and friends and 2) to test the mediating role of parent satisfaction. The research model was quantitative research and adds to the research body regarding K12 international schools. The sample group was 425 Generation Y parents whose children attend The International School of Macao. The parents completed on a contextually relevant and reliable survey in English or Chinese. The results were analyzed uses SPSS and AMOS to develop a structural equation model. The research findings were 1) parent satisfaction had the largest impact on the likelihood of parents to recommend the school through word of mouth. Parent perception of service quality and brand trust had an impact on satisfaction. 2) satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between service quality and word of mouth and partially mediates the relationship between brand trust and word of mouth.

The findings from this research fills a gap in research in K12 international schools and informs school administrators of the importance of fulfilling parent satisfaction to affect school recommendations from parents.

Keywords: Satisfaction; Service Quality; Brand Trust; Word of Mouth; International Education; Mediation Effect

Introduction

How parents speak about a school often influences how others view the school and the likelihood of others joining the school. Private international schools must work to maintain their growth and performance. Parents enroll their children in private international schools in the expectation that they

will be able to go to elite foreign universities after graduation, but before graduation, schools need to also make sure that their students and parents are happy with the day-to-day experiences. However, too often, just as higher education (HE) institutions often seem to put little effort into improving students' experiences (Morgan & Rao, 2003), the same could be true about international schools. However, as Teo and Soutar (2012) pointed out, as competition for HE in Singapore increased, the need for increased efforts to improve student experience also increased. As shown in other service industries, satisfaction and perceived service quality are the two key components to acquire a competitive advantage (Cronin Jr. et al., 2000). Happy parents are more inclined to stay at the school year after year, as well as tell their friends and families about their experiences (Canals et al., 2019). Schools that want to retain their current families and draw in new ones must be aware of the variables that lead to such recommendations from current families. These recommendations may be verbal or, more frequently, online through social media sites (Poulis et al., 2019).

The goal of the current study is to identify the variables that have a substantial impact on parents' likelihood to provide the school positive reviews and referrals. In the current study, the opinions of Generation Y parents at The International School of Macao (TIS), located in the Chinese territory of Macau, was examined. Multigenerational parents attend overseas schools. Generation Y parents, also called Millennials, were born between 1981 and 2004 inclusively. Generation Y parents place greater emphasis on caring and protecting their children while also encouraging their children to be involved in community service. Emphasis on academic achievement of the children of Generation Y parents is increasing and parents are likely to have higher expectations on their children's teachers and schools (Howe, 2010).

Research Objectives

1. To study the impact of satisfaction, service quality and brand trust on the word of mouth of Generation Y parents at The International School of Macao.
2. To study the extent to which satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and word of mouth; and brand trust and word of mouth.

Literature Review

Satisfaction

The satisfaction of both students and parents is often closely monitored by schools using both internal and external procedures. School-related non-academic and academic aspects are frequently

included in the multifaceted concept of satisfaction (Friedman et al., 2007). Parents who are not happy will complain, spread negative messages, and, if things don't change, they will withdraw their children from the school and look for another one.

In the research, satisfaction is informed by the expectancy disconfirmation theory (McQuitty & Finn, 2000; Oliver, 1977, 1980) as the “consequence of the difference between the expected and perceived performance” (Kataria & Saini, 2019, p. 65). Consumer satisfaction is a unique type of customer attitude used in the service sector that takes into account how much a customer likes or dislikes a service after using it (Wu, 2011).

Research is also interested in how satisfaction affects customer loyalty. Customer loyalty can be exhibited in repurchasing, continued use, or positive word of mouth. Jain (2018) was not able to establish a link between satisfaction and WOM or brand loyalty. A satisfied customer may or not be loyal online or engage in WOM. While satisfaction was not sufficient by itself in generating WOM, building customer–brand relationships on social media did have a significant and positive impact on brand trust, brand loyalty and WOM for the brand (Jain et al., 2018).

Service Quality

Service quality is most often based on the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Clow et al., 1997; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985). It can be challenging to measure as a result. Customers can have high or low service quality expectations. If the service quality meets or exceeds those expectations, the customer will perceive the service quality as being high.

While service quality has been researched extensively in many industries, its use in education has been limited to higher education (Hoang, 2013) and rarely used in K–12 education. In a university setting, the student receiving the service also decides whether it fits their expectations (Hill, 1995). Even though they may have only received some of the services directly and others indirectly, parents in K–12 education decide whether the service satisfies their expectations. As a result, a contextualized measurement tool is required to fill this gap.

Brand Trust

The willingness of the typical consumer to rely on the brand's capacity to fulfill its stated role is known as brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Relationship development and brand marketing depend on trust. The most powerful connection tool for a company is brand trust, which is built on positive expectations of the organization (Ramadan, 2018).

Brand trust is essential for establishing a relationship between a parent and a school. That relationship would have many implications for the school. Brand trust is important for establishing the consumer–brand relationship on social media (Jain et al., 2018) and plays an important role in developing

the emotional connection in the consumer–brand relationship that can lead to brand satisfaction (Sarkar et al., 2019). According to Brzozowska–Wo (2018), brand trust influences whether a consumer will post an online review more than perceived risk and increases brand loyalty and word–of–mouth (Jain et al., 2018).

Word of Mouth

Extensive studies have shown that WOM has a direct effect on a consumer's expectation and on a consumer's perceived benefit which leads to a decision to purchase (Cham et al., 2016). WOM is generated by the consumer after purchasing and thereby influences other potential customers. In this way, the consumer is the producer of the WOM (Jain et al., 2018; See–To & Ho, 2014). WOM is often a behaviour associated with customer loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). Like customer loyalty, parent loyalty can be defined as parents who give positive word of mouth, recommends the school to others, and encourages others to use the school service (Li & Hung, 2009).

A special kind of WOM includes the liking, commenting, sharing of posts on social media (Liu et al., 2017). The effect of WOM is directly related to the strength of the tie between the author and receiver (Abubakar et al., 2016). Prospective parents put a lot of faith in the WOM of their friends who are already enrolled in the institution.

Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

Expectation disconfirmation theory (Swamidass, 2000), also known previously as expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1977, 1980), suggests that satisfaction is a measure between what is expected and what is experienced. With the same level of service quality, a person with low expectations might be content whereas a person with high expectations wouldn't be. If a service experience satisfies or surpasses a customer's expectations, then the customer is satisfied. (Clow et al., 1997).

Social Influence

To understand the importance of WOM, one must understand social influence. A person will have a greater impact on us if we have a closer relationship with that person. The degree to which a person thinks that those close to them want them to make a certain choice or exhibit a certain behavior is known as social influence (Venkatesh et al., 2002). Social influence can be demonstrated in multiple ways, including through word of mouth (Abubakar et al., 2016), social networks (See–To & Ho, 2014) and online brand communities (Ozuem et al., 2021). Social influence exemplifies the value of word of mouth to educational institutions. Social influence will have an impact on prospective parents' selection of the school for their own children as they receive recommendations and referrals from friends and family they can trust.

Satisfaction as a mediating variable

Numerous studies have examined the direct effect of a variable on satisfaction and the indirect effect on word of mouth. Komundo (2012) found that service recovery had a direct impact on customer satisfaction and indirect impact on WOM. Similarly, Arasli (2005) found that service quality had a direct impact on satisfaction and indirect impact on WOM. However, neither examined the extent to which satisfaction acted as a mediating variable in their models.

Many studies have found that satisfaction acts as a partial mediator. Kataria (2019) found that satisfaction partially mediated between perceived quality and brand loyalty. Satisfaction has been found to partially mediate between service quality and WOM (Mahadin & Akroush, 2019) and partially mediate between service quality and student loyalty (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016).

In some cases, it has been discovered that satisfaction completely mediates the relationship between two other factors such as brand loyalty and brand trust (Kataria & Saini, 2019). In this study, a mediating variable is fully mediating if it has an indirect impact but no direct impact or the direct effect is not significant (Hair et al., 2010).

Research framework and hypothesis

The current study has developed the following research model to investigate the effect of service quality, satisfaction, and brand trust on word of mouth, where service quality and brand trust are considered independent variables and satisfaction is considered as a mediating variable. The following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.* Service quality has significant and positive impact on parent word of mouth.
- H2.* Satisfaction has significant and positive impact on parent word of mouth.
- H3.* Brand trust has significant and positive impact on parent word of mouth.
- H4.* Service quality has significant and positive impact on satisfaction.
- H5.* Brand trust has significant and positive impact on satisfaction.
- H6.* Satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and parent word of mouth.
- H7.* Satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand trust and parent word of mouth.

Theoretical frameworks from higher education settings (Liu et al., 2017; Osman & Saputra, 2019) were combined to find the relationships proposed in the hypotheses. The conceptual framework provided a model to examine the relationships between the constructs as well as to determine the mediating role of satisfaction as seen in Figure 1.

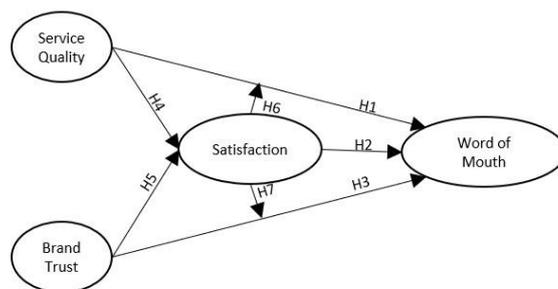


Figure 1: The research model of antecedents of word of mouth and mediating role of satisfaction

Methodology

A quantitative survey was designed to evaluate parent responses through 39 items developed from scale items of previous researchers. Brand trust had 4 items based on Jain (2018). Word of mouth had 3 items based on Ahmadi (2018). Satisfaction had 4 items based on Cham (2016). Service quality had 27 scale items using modified scale items from Cham (2017). All the scale items were contextualized for the current study and specific industry. A five-point Likert-type scale was used for all items.

Contextualizing the Survey Instrument

As the original scale items were not developed for international K-12 education, they had to be contextualized. The researcher converted the scale items to the K-12 education context and the conversion was verified through an Item Objective Congruence test (IOC). The IOC test featured three experts in international education; two university deans and international accreditation officer. The experts were asked to determine the suitability of the construct to measure the given variable. Items that did not achieve a majority approval (>0.6) were revised based on the expert feedback and resubmitted during the second round.

The service quality scale components from private health care were initially changed to fit the educational environment to contextualize service quality in an international school. The original 23 scale items created by Lam (1997) and operationalized by Cham (2016) were chosen for their reliability (Cham et al., 2016). The IOC produced 27 scale items and highlighted the important roles that teachers, school administration, and support staff performed in providing for parents and kids. However, during CFA, the scale items were reduced to 15 items to attain convergent and discriminant validity.

Population

Generation Y parents, defined as those who were born between 1981 and 2004, were the focus of this study, which was a component of a broader study focusing on Generation X and Generation Y. The school directly emailed 1,935 current parents. Follow up by homeroom teachers was a key in

achieving 1,041 responses including 499 responses from Generation X parents, 475 from Generation Y parents, and 67 other responses.

Results

Demographic Information of the Sample

Of the 422 valid responses from parents, 74.9% (316) were female, 23.2% (98) were male and 1.9% (8) preferred not to state their gender. Most respondents were married or living with a partner 90.8% (383), 5.7% (24) were single or divorced and 3.5% (15) preferred not to state their marital status.

The following descriptive statistics and assessment of normality is presented in Table 1. While the values for skewness and kurtosis between -2 and $+2$ are considered acceptable to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2010), only SAT4 exceeds the -2 , $+2$ limit. However, Kline (Kline, 2016) suggests that when using a large sample population procedure, such as SEM, one could reject the null hypothesis (of consistency with the normal distribution) and adopt a more descriptive approach to assessing normality. As such, the results are considered acceptable.

Table 1 Mean, standard deviation and assessment of normality

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Brand Trust	BT1	4.24	0.618	-0.326	0.119	0.004	0.237
	BT2	3.98	0.736	-0.222	0.119	-0.482	0.237
	BT3	4.36	0.660	-0.802	0.119	0.925	0.237
	BT4	4.17	0.667	-0.688	0.119	1.767	0.237
Service Quality	SQ1	4.23	0.608	-0.413	0.119	1.134	0.237
	SQ2	4.13	0.597	-0.186	0.119	0.293	0.237
	SQ3	4.14	0.601	-0.460	0.119	1.812	0.237
	SQ4	4.12	0.622	-0.266	0.119	0.257	0.237
	SQ5	4.26	0.554	0.020	0.119	-0.420	0.237
	SQ6	4.08	0.587	-0.157	0.119	0.432	0.237
	SQ7	4.18	0.605	-0.364	0.119	1.173	0.237
	SQ8	4.39	0.581	-0.316	0.119	-0.725	0.237
	SQ9	4.24	0.598	-0.139	0.119	-0.491	0.237
	SQ10	4.28	0.559	-0.023	0.119	-0.513	0.237
	SQ11	4.20	0.590	-0.222	0.119	0.290	0.237
	SQ12	4.39	0.556	-0.167	0.119	-0.856	0.237
	SQ13	4.29	0.578	-0.201	0.119	-0.148	0.237
	SQ14	4.27	0.543	0.077	0.119	-0.425	0.237
	SQ15	4.03	0.690	-0.295	0.119	-0.091	0.237

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Satisfaction	SAT1	4.33	0.609	-0.328	0.119	-0.654	0.237
	SAT2	4.27	0.685	-0.409	0.119	-0.850	0.237
	SAT3	4.24	0.640	-0.311	0.119	-0.419	0.237
	SAT4	4.28	0.682	-0.969	0.119	2.485	0.237
Word of Mouth	WOM1	4.42	0.595	-0.554	0.119	-0.228	0.237
	WOM2	4.38	0.635	-0.584	0.119	-0.328	0.237
	WOM3	4.27	0.733	-0.771	0.119	0.428	0.237

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs and to determine the model fit, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized. To test convergent validity, the following four criteria should be met as suggested by Hair et al (2010); namely the construct reliability (Cronbach Alpha value) should be greater than 0.7; the explained variance (AVE) within each construct should be larger than 0.5; the standardized factor loading of each observed variable to the latent construct should be at least 0.60; and the composite reliability (CR) should be at last 0.70. As seen in Table 2, all four criteria were met. All the observed variables had a factor loading greater than the recommended minimum of 0.6. The Cronbach Alpha values are well above the minimum of 0.7. The AVE values for all constructs exceed the minimum of 0.5 and the composite reliability (CR) values exceed the minimum of 0.7. These results demonstrate that all the constructs in this study achieved the acceptable level of convergent validity.

Table 2 Convergent validity assessment

Variables	Factor Loading	t-value	CR	AVE	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Trust (BT)					
BT1	.804	-	.834	.557	.840
BT2	.754	16.342			
BT3	.686	14.575			
BT4	.738	15.905			
Service Quality (SQ)			.953	.575	.954
SQ1	.734	-			
SQ2	.762	15.766			
SQ3	.741	15.295			
SQ4	.784	16.268			
SQ5	.719	14.821			

SQ6	.852	14.655			
SQ7	.746	15.396			
SQ8	.756	16.419			
SQ9	.809	15.300			
SQ10	.852	17.777			
SQ11	.775	16.037			
SQ12	.736	15.183			
SQ13	.765	15.816			
SQ14	.773	16.013			
SQ15	.693	14.255			
Satisfaction (SAT)			.901	.694	.893
SAT1	.853	–			
SAT2	.846	21.147			
SAT3	.870	22.217			
SAT4	.760	18.655			
Word of Mouth (WOM)			.885	.720	.876
WOM1	.833	–			
WOM2	.906	22.101			
WOM3	.804	19.075			

Discriminant validity of this study were assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) method proposed by Hensler et al (2015). The statistical variances between the constructs are measured using discriminant validity. By comparing the correlations of indicators across constructs to the correlations of indicators within a concept, discriminant validity may be evaluated. If the correlation ratio is below 0.9, then discriminant validity exists (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT plugin by (Gaskin, 2016) was used in AMOS to determine the HTMT values. As seen in Table 3, the correlation ratios between all variables are below 0.9, thus discriminant validity for this study was achieved. Since convergent and discriminant validity were proved, construct validity was established.

Table 3 HTMT Analysis of the current study

	SQ	SAT	BT	WOM
SQ				
SAT	.790			
BT	.593	.746		
WOM	.688	.764	.841	

Based on the suggestion by Hair et al, (2009) the following criteria was used to determine model fit including chi-square fit statistics over degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). A research model with a good fit meets the following criteria: CMIN/DF greater than 5; GFI greater than 0.85; AGFI, NFI, CFI and TLI greater than 0.8; and RMSEA less than 0.08. As seen in Table 4, the current research model exceeded every criterion and achieved acceptable model fit.

Table 4 Model Fit Criteria and values for the current study

Index	Acceptable Values	Statistical Values
CMIN/DF	< 5.00 (Al-Mamary & Shamsuddin, 2015)	2.210
GFI	≥ 0.85 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	.895
AGFI	≥ 0.80 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	.867
NFI	≥ 0.80 (Wu & Wang, 2006)	.929
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	.960
TLI	≥ 0.80 (Sharma et al., 2005)	.953
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Pedroso et al., 2016)	.0454
Model Summary		Acceptable Model Fit

Factor Loading

A structural equation model was created to determine the standardized path coefficients, including direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect of the constructs, given construct validity and an acceptable model fit. No further modifications to the SEM were necessary as the same model fit values as the measurement model were reported in Table 4. Thus, we can conclude that the model is valid (Hair et al., 2010). As can be seen in Table 5, the standardized direct and indirect effects were reported by the AMOS software and the total effect was calculated. The results are discussed in the following section.

Table 5 Direct, indirect, and total effect of the constructs of the present study

	SAT				WOM			
	Direct	Indirect	Total	R ²	Direct	Indirect	Total	R ²
BT	.440	–	.440	.624	.317	.283	.600	.621
SQ	.384	–	.384		-.151	.247	.096	
SAT	–	–	–		.642	–	.642	

The following structural equation model shown in Figure 2 was developed after the AMOS software analysis. The model demonstrates that not only does satisfaction have the greatest impact on word of mouth, but it also acts as a mediator for the impact of service quality and brand trust on word of mouth.



Figure 2: Illustrated structural equation model showing direct and indirect effects

Satisfaction was found to be a mediating variable for service quality (full mediation) and brand trust (partial mediation). Using 95% bias–corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals in AMOS, the significance level of the indirect effects was checked. The significance result and mediation result are shown in Table 6. As there was no direct effect but there is an indirect effect, then satisfaction is found to be fully mediating between service quality and word of mouth. However, as there is a direct effect between brand trust and word of mouth, the mediation of satisfaction is only a partial moderation.

Table 6 Direct, Indirect and Mediating Result

Hypothesis	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Result
SQ → SAT → WOM	-.151 (ns)	.283 ** (.002)	Full Mediation
BT → SAT → WOM	.317 (**)	.247 ** (.004)	Partial Mediation

**=p<.01; *=p<.05; ns="not significant"

The key focus of this research was to identify the impact of service quality and brand trust on satisfaction and word of mouth. The SEM identified the causal relationships and, as such, the proposed hypotheses can be answered. The results of the six hypotheses are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Causal Relationship	Std Loading and Significance Level
H1	SQ → WOM	Rejected (-.151, 0.086)
H2	SAT → WOM	Supported (.642, ***)
H3	BT → WOM	Supported (.317, **)
H4	SQ → SAT	Supported (.384, ***)
H5	BT → SAT	Supported (.440, ***)
H6	SQ → SAT → WOM	Supported (.283, ***)
H7	BT → SAT → WOM	Supported (.247, ***)

***=p<.001; **=p<.01; *=p<.05; ns="not significant"

Discussion

This study's primary goal was to examine the effects of service quality, customer happiness, and brand trust on parents' recommendations of K–12 international schools in Macau, China SAR. The findings demonstrate that satisfaction has the greatest impact on word of mouth and mediates the relationships that brand trust and service quality have on word of mouth. As a result, parent satisfaction is crucial in encouraging current parents to recommend and refer new families to the school. The impact of these variables are discussed below.

Influence of service quality on parent word of mouth

The results of the current study did not reveal a significant and direct relationship between service quality and parent word of mouth. As such, H1 was rejected. Although this finding does not support Chenet (2010) directly, it does support Chenet's finding that service quality's impact on word of mouth was stronger indirectly than directly. At first, these findings seem counter intuitive. Positive service experiences at the school might not be enough to convince a parent to recommend the school unless they are accompanied by overall school satisfaction. The current study also found that satisfaction fully mediates the impact that service quality has on word of mouth. Therefore, H6 was supported. While service quality's direct impact on word of mouth was not significant, it did have an indirect effect when mediated through satisfaction. When a variable has no direct impact but has an indirect impact, then it is a fully mediating variable as stated by Hair (2009). Unlike previous studies in higher education where satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between service quality and word of mouth (Mahadin & Akroush, 2019), this study found that satisfaction fully mediated the relationship. This finding underscores the importance of parents receiving positive service and being satisfied with the school.

Influence of satisfaction on parent word of mouth

The results of the current study revealed that satisfaction had a significant and direct impact on parent word of mouth. As such, H2 was supported. Satisfaction had the greatest total effect on word of mouth indicating that it plays an essential role in leading to referrals and recommendations from existing parents. This supports the previous research where satisfaction had a significant impact on word of mouth (Cham et al., 2016; Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012; Liu et al., 2017) and is seen as part of loyalty behaviour (Athavale et al., 2015).

Influence of brand trust on parent word of mouth

The current study found that brand trust had a direct effect on parent word of mouth. As such, H3 was supported. Parents that trust the school, including the brand, are more likely to recommend the school to others. It is also clear that when parents are satisfied, then brand trust has a greater impact

on word of mouth. The study also found that satisfaction partially mediates the impact that brand trust has on parent word of mouth thereby supporting H7. The indirect effect was a big enough impact to suggest that school leaders should continue to build brand trust while ensuring their parents are satisfied so that those parents will recommend the school to others. This is similar to previous studies that found that satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty (Kataria & Saini, 2019). As Liu (2017) discovered, trust led to word of mouth intention but only satisfaction led to word of mouth engagement (Liu et al., 2017).

Influence of service quality on parent satisfaction

The current study revealed that service quality had a significant and direct impact on parent satisfaction. As such, H4 was supported. Like satisfaction, service quality is a measure of the gap between expected results and actual results. When a parent receives lower than expected service, they perceive it as lower quality. Responding to a parent complaint with good service quality can lead to parent satisfaction (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012). When a parent receives higher than expected service, they perceive it as higher quality. This expectancy confirmation or expectancy disconfirmation applies to satisfaction as well (Clow et al., 1997). When a parent's needs are exceeded, they are more likely to be perceived as being satisfied.

Influence of brand trust on parent satisfaction

The current study found that brand trust had a significant and direct impact on parent satisfaction. As such, H5 was supported. While slightly higher than service quality, both had an impact on satisfaction and, indirectly, lead to school recommendations and referrals. The greater the impact that trust has on satisfaction (Chen, 2017; Osman & Saputra, 2019), the greater the effect on word of mouth.

School Leadership Implications

The findings of this study have significant influence on the strategic development and daily operation of schools. Parent satisfaction or happiness, not surprisingly, has the largest influence on parents' likelihood to recommend the school, hence school administration must make sure to accurately monitor parent satisfaction while simultaneously looking for ways to increase it. Improving the experience of the service received by the parents may not have a direct effect on referral rates but it will improve the satisfaction levels of parents. Similarly, increasing parent trust in the brand of the school may not lead directly to increased referrals but will increase parent satisfaction which will lead to increased referrals.

While many schools focus solely on measuring parent satisfaction and apply ad hoc endeavors to try to address dissatisfaction, this study further demonstrates that improving service quality and brand

trust will further enhance the satisfaction of parents. While more research is required to pinpoint additional factors that influence parent satisfaction, school administration would be wise to start by enhancing the level of service and brand recognition of the institution.

Limitations and Further Research

More research is required to determine whether the findings are confirmed at other schools and with parents from other generations because the current study was restricted to just Generation Y parents at one international school.

It would be appropriate to identify additional parent satisfaction antecedents and the extent, if any, that parent satisfaction might play as a further mediating role on increasing word of mouth given the role that satisfaction has had on word of mouth directly and indirectly through the mediation of brand trust and service quality.

Conclusion

This empirical study is the first to examine the influence of service quality, satisfaction, and brand trust on word of mouth behaviour in the K-12 international school industry. The study also identified the mediating role of satisfaction on the relationships between brand trust and service quality on word of mouth. While some research has been done in higher education regarding service quality, brand trust, satisfaction and word of mouth; there remains a significant gap in research conducted in K-12 education.

This study demonstrated that brand trust had a greater effect on satisfaction (0.440) than did service quality (0.384). This study demonstrated that satisfaction had the greatest direct impact on parents' word of mouth (0.642). The impact of service quality was not significant. This suggests that experiencing positive service quality is not sufficient for Generation Y parents to recommend the school. However, when mediated through satisfaction, brand trust had a significant total effect (0.600) on word of mouth and service quality had a smaller but still significant indirect effect (0.247) on word of mouth. As such, satisfaction can be said to fully mediate the relationship between service quality and word of mouth. This finding is highly important for school leaders who must ensure that parents are satisfied with the school. It suggests that improving service quality will positively improve satisfaction which, in turn, will improve parent's likelihood to recommend the school. However, if a parent is not satisfied with the school, better service quality will not be sufficient to encourage parent referrals.

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