

MAPPING IDEA & LITERATURE FORMAT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of Service Quality and Owner's Personal Branding on Decisions to Use Training Services Through Customer Trust

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of service quality and the owner's personal branding on customers' decision to use training services, through customer trust, at PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi, Sidoarjo. The study used primary data collected through questionnaires distributed to training participants who had attended training more than once during the period from January 2023 to September 2025, with a sample of 80 respondents. The sampling technique was non-probability purposive sampling. The data were analyzed quantitatively using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results indicate that service quality and the owner's personal branding have a positive and significant effect on customer trust; however, they do not directly affect the decision to use training services. Customer trust significantly affects the decision to use training services and serves as a mediating variable. The main finding of this study shows that customer trust is a key factor that bridges the influence of service quality and personal branding on customers' decisions to use training services. Accordingly, trust plays a strategic role in strengthening the decision to use training services.

Keywords: Service Quality, Owner's Personal Branding, Customer Trust, Decision to Use Training Services.

I. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive service business environment, companies are required to create superior value through high-quality service and a strong image in customers' eyes. The training service industry, in particular, faces challenges in building customer trust because services are intangible and heavily depend on perception. Service quality is an important factor in creating customer satisfaction and trust, while the business owner's personal branding also plays a role in building business credibility and attractiveness. Consequently, companies increasingly recognize the importance of human resource development through training programs to improve competence and competitiveness (Noe, 2020). PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi is a company engaged in training services that has shown an increase in the number of participants over the last three years. This phenomenon is important to examine, particularly in relation to the factors that influence customers' decisions to use training services. In the context of service marketing, service quality is a primary factor that influences customer perceptions and behavior (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Service quality reflects a company's ability to meet customers' expectations through its services. In addition, in service businesses that

depend heavily on human interaction, the owner's personal branding is an important element, particularly because they rely on individual credibility and professional reputation (Montoya & Vandehey, 2008).

However, the decision to use services is not always directly influenced by these two factors. Customer trust often becomes a key variable that bridges the relationship between service quality and the decision to use services (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Several studies have shown that trust serves as a mediating variable between service quality and customer decisions (Dam & Dam, 2021; Cuong, 2021). Customer trust is an important variable in building long-term relationships between companies and customers, especially in service businesses that depend heavily on individual credibility and professional reputation. Trust can influence customers' decisions in selecting a service, particularly intangible services such as training. Several previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the direct influence of service quality and personal branding on the decision to use services. This inconsistency indicates a research gap that requires further investigation, particularly in the context of training services. Based on the preceding discussion, this study aims to analyze how customer trust mediates the effects of service quality and the owner's personal branding on the decision to use training services.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Service Quality

Service quality is a company's ability to deliver services that meet or exceed customer expectations. The dimensions of service quality include five main dimensions used to measure service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions refer to the SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and were further developed by Jiri Podhirna and Seungho Cho (2019), who expanded SERVQUAL by adding the affective response dimension. High service quality can increase customer trust because customers perceive that their needs and expectations are being fulfilled.

2.2. Owner's Personal Branding

Personal branding is an individual's effort to build a strong and positive self-image in the public eye. In service businesses, the owner's personal branding is an important factor, as customers often evaluate service quality based on the reputation of the individuals involved. Strong personal branding can enhance perceptions of credibility and customer trust. McNally and Speak (2011) define personal branding as others' perceptions and beliefs about an individual, based on competence, values, and the consistency of behavior demonstrated over time, in which the individual consciously manages and presents a professional image to create a positive perception in others' minds. Personal branding is reflected in an individual's reputation, expertise, experience, and behavioral consistency across professional situations.

2.3. Customer Trust

Customer trust is the belief customers have in a company's integrity, competence, and reliability. Trust serves as the foundation for long-term relationships between customers and companies. According to Kotler, Armstrong, Harris, and He (2020) in *Principles of Marketing*, customer trust is an emotional and cognitive belief in a company's reliability, integrity, and concern for customers.

2.4. Decision to Use Services

The decision to use a service is the process by which customers choose to use a service based on considerations such as needs, perceived quality, and trust. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), the consumer buying decision is the psychological and behavioral process through which consumers recognize

a need, search for information, evaluate alternatives, and ultimately decide whether to purchase a product or service.

2.5. Hypothesis Development

- H1: Service quality has a significant effect on customer trust.
- H2: The owner's personal branding significantly affects customer trust.
- H3: Service quality affects the decision to use services.
- H4: The owner's personal branding affects the decision to use services.
- H5: Customer trust affects the decision to use services.

III. Research Method

This study used a quantitative, survey-based approach. Data were collected via a Google Forms questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, a commonly used scale in consumer behavior research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The study was conducted at PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi in Sidoarjo. The research was carried out over four months, from August to November 2025. Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for studies with complex models and relatively small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). Model evaluation was conducted through outer model testing (validity and reliability) and inner model testing (relationships among variables). The research population consisted of PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi training participants during the 2023-2025 period. Using the Slovin formula, a sample of 80 respondents was obtained and selected through purposive sampling, with the criterion that respondents had attended training more than once.

3.1. Variables and Indicators

a. Service Quality Variable (X1)

Service quality refers to PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi's ability to deliver services that meet or exceed the expectations of training participants. It is measured using the five SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988), namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

b. Personal Branding Variable (X2)

The strong personal branding of the owner, who also serves as the main trainer at PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi, can enhance training participants' perceptions of credibility and trust (McNally & Speak, 2011). The indicators used are competence, consistency, and perception.

c. Customer Trust Variable (Z)

Customer trust refers to participants' belief in PT Kemilau Cahaya Inspirasi's integrity, competence, and reliability (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris, & He, 2020). It is measured using the following indicators: reliability, integrity, competence, benevolence, and consistency.

d. Decision Variable (Y)

The consumer buying decision is the psychological and behavioral process through which consumers recognize a need, search for information, evaluate alternatives, and ultimately decide whether to purchase a product or service. It includes interest, purchase decisions, and recommendations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

The indicators used are need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.

3.2. Analysis Technique

Data analysis using PLS-SEM included the following:

- a. Validity testing ($AVE > 0.5$). A construct is considered to meet convergent validity when it has an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5 ($AVE > 0.5$). This means that more than 50% of the variance in the indicators can be explained by the construct being measured (Hair et al., 2019).
- b. Reliability testing (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$). Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha. A construct is considered reliable when its Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.7$) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Hypothesis testing ($t\text{-statistic} > 1.96$). If the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted and considered significant. If the t-statistic is less than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis is rejected and considered nonsignificant. The t-statistic indicates the strength of the effect between variables, whereas the p-value indicates the level of statistical significance. The threshold of 1.96 is used at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Validity and Reliability Testing

All indicators met the criteria for validity and reliability; therefore, the model was considered appropriate for use.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Results for Convergent Validity Testing

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Criterion	Result
Service Quality	0.615	> 0.5	Valid
Owner's Personal Branding	0.713	> 0.5	Valid
Customer Trust	0.740	> 0.5	Valid
Decision to Use Services	0.655	> 0.5	Valid

Based on the table above, the AVE values for each variable are as follows: service quality = 0.615; the owner's personal branding = 0.713; customer trust = 0.740; and the decision to use training services = 0.655. All four variables have AVE values greater than 0.5; therefore, all indicators in this study are valid and appropriate for use.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρ_a)	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	Criterion	Result
Service Quality	0.910	0.913	0.927	> 0.7	Reliable
Owner's Personal Branding	0.942	0.943	0.952	> 0.7	Reliable
Customer Trust	0.961	0.962	0.966	> 0.7	Reliable

Decision to Use Training Services	0.912	0.922	0.930	> 0.7	Reliable
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Based on the table 2, each variable tested in this study has Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values greater than 0.7. Therefore, all variables in this study are reliable.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Result

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	t-statistic (O/STDEV)	t-table	p-value	Sig.	Conclusion
1	X1 -> Z	2.345	> 1.96	0.010	< 0.05	H1 Accepted
2	X2 -> Z	5.708	> 1.96	0.000	< 0.05	H2 Accepted
3	X1 -> Y	0.286	> 1.96	0.387	< 0.05	H3 Rejected
4	X2 -> Y	0.218	> 1.96	0.453	< 0.05	H4 Rejected
5	Z -> Y	5.467	> 1.96	0.000	< 0.05	H5 Accepted
6	X1 -> Z -> Y	2.114	> 1.96	0.017	< 0.05	H6 Accepted
7	X2 -> Z -> Y	3.311	> 1.96	0.000	< 0.05	H7 Accepted

Based on the PLS-SEM data processing results, hypothesis testing was conducted by examining t-statistics and p-values. The testing criteria indicate that a t-statistic greater than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05 support the hypothesis. In contrast, a t-statistic less than 1.96 and a p-value greater than 0.05 indicate rejection of the hypothesis. The results show that service quality and the owner's personal branding significantly affect customer trust, but they do not directly and significantly affect the decision to use training services.

4.3. Discussion

The results show that service quality significantly affects customer trust. This finding is consistent with service-marketing theory, which holds that service quality is a primary determinant of customers' perceptions and beliefs about a service provider (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Consistent service quality that meets customer expectations creates a sense of security and confidence in transactions. This finding is supported by prior research indicating that service quality has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust (Abadi et al., 2023). In addition, Tjiptono (2019) states that superior service quality strengthens long-term customer relationships by increasing trust. This indicates that the higher the service quality, the greater the customer trust in the company. Customers view service consistency as a foundation for developing confidence in a service provider. Furthermore, the results indicate that the owner's personal branding significantly affects customer trust. In the context of service businesses, particularly training services, the owner is often the primary representation of the service quality being offered. Strong, credible, and authentic personal branding can enhance perceptions of professionalism and customer trust. This finding is consistent with Tarina et al. (2023), who found that personal branding positively affects consumer trust. In addition, Keller (2018) emphasizes that brand strength, including personal brand strength, plays an important role in building brand credibility, which, in turn, directly affects customer trust. The owner's personal branding was also found to influence customer trust strongly. This shows that the owner's image, credibility, and reputation are important factors in building positive customer perceptions, particularly in the training-service industry, which depends heavily on personal figures and competencies. This also indicates that the owner's reputation and experience are important factors in increasing trust. Nevertheless, this study found that service quality does not have a significant direct effect on the decision to use services. This finding indicates that customers do not necessarily make decisions solely based on perceived service quality. From the perspective of consumer behavior,

purchasing or service-use decisions are complex processes that involve psychological factors, including trust. This finding is consistent with Kotler and Keller (2016), who state that purchasing decisions are influenced by internal and external factors, including perceived risk and trust levels. Thus, service quality functions more as a trust-building factor than as a direct determinant of the decision.

A similar result was found for the personal branding variable, which did not have a significant effect on the decision to use services. This finding indicates that although personal branding can attract attention and shape initial perceptions, it is not sufficiently strong to drive decisions without trust. This result is consistent with Agesta et al. (2024). The finding strengthens the argument that personal branding serves as an initial stimulus in the marketing process, but the final decision continues to depend on customers' trust levels (Erdem & Swait, 2018). Furthermore, the results show that customer trust significantly affects the decision to use services. This finding strengthens the theory that trust is a key factor in reducing uncertainty and risk in service transactions. In the context of intangible training services, customers tend to rely on trust as a basis for decision-making. This finding is supported by Hakim et al. (2025), who found that trust significantly affects purchase decisions for Hajj Savings products. In addition, according to Lupiyoadi (2018), trust is the primary foundation for building customer loyalty and long-term customer decisions.

Moreover, this study's results show that customer trust mediates the effect of service quality on the decision to use services. This means that service quality will effectively influence customer decisions only when it first increases trust. This finding is consistent with Hair et al. (2022), who explain that in SEM models, mediating variables often play an important role in explaining indirect relationships among variables. Thus, trust functions as a psychological mechanism that bridges service quality and customer decisions. Customer trust was also found to mediate the influence of personal branding on the decision to use services. This indicates that the owner's personal branding does not directly influence decisions, but rather does so through prior trust formation. This finding is consistent with the concept of brand credibility proposed by Erdem and Swait (2018), which holds that brand credibility increases trust and ultimately influences consumer behavior.

Overall, this study's results affirm that customer trust is a key variable in explaining the relationships among service quality, personal branding, and the decision to use services. This study provides an empirical contribution by clarifying that, in the context of training services, direct approaches through service quality and personal branding are insufficient to influence customer decisions without trust as the main mediator. Customer trust was found to be the most influential variable affecting the decision to use services. This confirms that trust is a key factor in consumer behavior, particularly when customers choose intangible services. This finding supports relationship marketing theory, which holds that trust is a key variable influencing customer decisions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Customer trust was also proven to be a strong mediating variable. In the context of training services, customers tend to consider trust before making decisions, and decisions are often not made entirely by individual participants. Still, they are influenced by company decision-makers. This explains why the direct effects were not significant (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

V. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that service quality and the owner's personal branding significantly affect customer trust. However, these two variables do not directly affect the decision to use training services. Customer trust significantly affects service use and serves as a mediating variable that links service quality and personal branding to customer decisions. This finding indicates that customer trust is a key factor in increasing the likelihood of using training services. Therefore, companies need to focus on strategies that build and enhance customer trust through consistent service quality and strong personal branding. This study strengthens the concept that customer trust is an important mediating variable in the relationship among service quality, personal branding, and the decision to use services. Training-service companies need to consistently improve service quality, build credible personal branding for their owners, and focus on strategies that strengthen customer trust.

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