Influence of user experience, product innovation, and customer relationship management on word of mouth with the customer satisfaction as a mediating role in by.U digital provider

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

ABSTRACT

In an era of rapidly evolving technology, telecommunications companies must compete quickly to create product innovations that suit the ever-changing preferences of Generation Z. Telkomsel, introduced by.U., which a digital provider that prioritizes exceptional User Experience. A good User Experience has the potential to generate long-term benefits by increasing Product Innovation and establishing efficient Customer Relationship Management to develop Customer Satisfaction. Customer Satisfaction generates positive Word of Mouth recommendations. This study explored the influence of User Experience, Product Innovation, and Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth through Customer Satisfaction among 227 respondents from Indonesia. Data was collected through online questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Model (SEM) AMOS 24. Results indicate that User Experience, Product Innovation, and Customer Relationship Management have significant impacts on Customer Satisfaction and Word of Mouth. Additionally, Customer Satisfaction mediates the relationship between User Experience and Product Innovation on Word of Mouth. An intriguing discovery was found that Customer Satisfaction does not significantly mediate the link between Customer Relationship Management and Word of Mouth. This study aims to offer valuable insights and practical recommendations for companies and marketing practitioners, aiding in the development of adaptive strategies to stay competitive in the digital era.

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1.   Introduction

Digital transformation is the fourth industrial revolution that fundamentally alters business models and performance (Lanzolla et al., 2020). Realizing that new technologies have enormous potential to spur innovation and competitive advantage motivates the push toward digital transformation (Solberg et al., 2020). As technology evolves rapidly, the need for network services intensifies, prompting telecom providers to compete to provide consumers with feature-packed products (van der Burg et al., 2019). Especially with the emergence of a young, tech-savvy generation known as Generation Z, who are highly focused on digitalization, personalization, and transparency.

Generation Z is the youngest age group born between 1997 and 2012 (Schmidt et al., 2023). The results of a study presented by the Varkey Foundation entitled "Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey What the World's Young Feel and Think" shows that of the 20,088 respondents of Generation Z or as many as 84% of them said that they had positive expectations and beliefs in technology. From this, Gen Z believes technological developments can create hope for a better future.

Seeing this phenomenon, telecommunications companies are competing to find breakthroughs to win customers' hearts. They strive to develop innovations that can encourage the development of the digital ecosystem in Indonesia. Telkomsel, as one of the longest-running mobile telecommunications providers in Indonesia, must continue to innovate to remain relevant amid changes in the business environment and society. The success of innovation is one of the most critical factors for companies to achieve their goals and objectives (Franceschelli et al., 2018); (Santos et al., 2018); (Hanifah et al., 2019).

Telkomsel's innovation is to launch new services specifically for Generation Z, considering their population is growing much faster than previous generations (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). In 2019, Telkomsel was officially launched by.U, the first digital prepaid-based telecommunication service available in Indonesia, targeting the Generation Z segment in Indonesia. It offers a fully digital experience where users may personalize and handle every step of the service usage procedure online, including selecting a delivery choice, phone number, internet quota, additional quota, and payment.

Seeing that by.U has been well received by the market, starting with the increasing number of users and the many awards they have received, has resulted in the emergence of many new competitors in the field of digital providers in Indonesia, thus tightening market competition Developing products and services that encourage consumers to experience something novel is one of the ways businesses may compete.

User Experience can guide companies to understand customer needs and wants through features, design structure, product usability, and other factors that can create a pleasant visual experience, comfort, and customer satisfaction when using these products and services (Feng & Wei, 2019). Meeting all user needs is essential for achieving an outstanding User Experience (Gordon & Rohrer, 2022). User Experience evaluation enables the assessment of products in various application areas, providing valuable insights into how to measure business success in terms of services.

One tactic to succeed in competition through product is to have an innovation or new products ready in response to rivals' offerings. Product innovation refers to any new or updated item or product that draws customers by being developed or altered (Dachi, 2020). It fulfils consumer demands, addresses product failure issues, and increases customer satisfaction (Panigrahi et al., 2021). Companies use this to ensure their survival because current products are susceptible to changes in consumer needs and technological advancements, shorter product life cycles, and increasingly fierce domestic and international competition (Kuncoro & Suriani, 2018).

In addition to product innovation, companies must also present a good Customer Relationship Management strategy. Based on (Ritter & Geersbro, 2018), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a comprehensive approach that aims to increase customer satisfaction, maintain customer loyalty, and increase profitability by fostering effective relationships with customers and interacting with parties who have an interest in the company (Baashar et al., 2020). CRM builds, maintains, and sustains long-term customer relationships through information technology to improve economic efficiency (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022). According to earlier studies, CRM will impact many firms (Rahimi et al., 2017), as each can design its customer relationship strategy (Mang'unyi et al., 2018). Furthermore, because it can be difficult to achieve both goals, CRM tactics have been widely employed in the service industry to raise customer satisfaction and retain loyalty (Herman et al., 2021).

The ability to acquire a large number of customers is key to the survival and success of a company. Responsive services, such as responding quickly to customer requests, can significantly increase Customer Satisfaction (Supriyanto et al., 2021). Customer Satisfaction is an evaluation by consumers of a product or service, which involves assessing whether it has met their expectations and needs (Rasyidin & Listiana, 2021). Customers will feel pleased if their expectations are fulfilled or even beyond. Consequently, these satisfied customers will share their positive experiences with other service provider customers (Fadilah et al., 2023).

So, what is equally important for companies to market a product or service is Word of Mouth. It is a promotional method that sets customer expectations for a product. WOM can also be interpreted as a communication process by providing individual and group recommendations for a product or service that aims to provide personalized information (Kotler & Keller, 2021). The positive effect of satisfaction can show that the more satisfied a customer is, the more he will do positive WOM directly according to the customer's awareness. And vice versa, if the performance of the selected product or service does not match customer expectations, then they will do negative WOM, which can harm the company itself (Wahyuningsih

& Nurdin, 2011). This theory is supported by research conducted (Wahyuni & Ekawati, 2018); (Pratiwi & Sayang Telagawathi, 2021) and (Khoo, 2022) with the results of research on Customer Satisfaction is positive and significant on WOM. (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018) claim that through social media and other communication channels, eWOM generates over 3 billion brand impressions every day. Because of this, WOM becomes an active communication channel that enhances customers' social and psychological well-being (S. J. Park et al., 2018).

Various studies have previously been researched by.U (Hidayat et al., 2021); (Rintyarna et al., 2022); and (Utamima et al., 2023) but they have largely been discussed in the information technology sector considering by.U is a new type of service in the Indonesian telecoms business. As a result, in this study, researchers will look into the aspects that contribute to customer satisfaction, from user experience and product innovation to customer relationship management. Since all client transactions take place within the application, user experience is critical for digital providers. Meanwhile, by.U, as a new service on the market, must give product innovation in order to capture client attention. Priority must also be given to the company-customer relationship. Companies can use Customer Relationship Management to track revenue growth, marketing campaign efficacy, and customer satisfaction. Companies can use this monitoring to find areas for improvement and make strategic adjustments. This research will focus on by.U's Generation Z users, supported by BPS statistics (2020), which show that Generation Z is the largest group in Indonesia, making up approximately 27.94% of the population. This population group is skilled in technology and social media, creating a promising potential market for by.U, which strategically focuses on technology-oriented consumers. Therefore, this research attempts to comprehend what drives customer satisfaction in Gen Z users and how this leads to positive Word of Mouth throughout the community by evaluating proposed variables.

The research provides practical insights for by.U to enhance user experience, innovate products, and optimize customer relationship management strategically. It guides decision-makers in aligning these factors to positively impact customer satisfaction and cultivate favorable word-of-mouth. Additionally, the research advances relationship marketing theories by providing empirical evidence of the interplay between user experience, product innovation, customer relationship management, and customer satisfaction in the digital service provider context. The theoretical implications are not confined to the digital provider industry, as the identified relationships and the mediating role of customer satisfaction provide insights applicable to various industries, enhancing the understanding of how these factors influence customer behavior and advocacy across diverse contexts.

2. Research Method

This study adopted a causal associative research design with a quantitative approach through a questionnaire with 227 respondents. The assessment on the questionnaire uses a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with the categories: Strongly Agree has a value of 5; Agree has a value of 4; Undecided has a value of 3; Disagree has a value of 2; and Strongly Disagree has a value of 1. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents online. The population in this study consisted of Generation Z by.U users. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with two sample criteria: respondents aged 11-26 years and had purchased products or services offered by.U, at least 3 times within 6 months. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to analyze the data using the AMOS 24 program.

The six User Experience items in this study refer to the User Experience evaluation model in the form of a questionnaire proposed by (Schrepp et al., 2017), which includes attractiveness, perspicuity, efficiency, dependability, stimulation, and novelty. Then, the Product Innovation variable has three items referring to (Suryana, 2013), including new types of updates, quality improvements, types, models, packaging designs, and features. The Customer Relationship Management variable refers to (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001), which has three items: continuity marketing, one-to-one marketing, and partnering programs. Meanwhile, the Customer Satisfaction variable in this study refers to measuring customer satisfaction (Moore & Wilkie, 2005), which has 4 items: expectation, performance, comparison, confirmation, and discrepancy. The Word of Mouth variable uses 3 items (Laroche et al., 2005): talking about positive information, providing recommendations, and providing encouragement.

3. Results And Discussions

Characteristics of Respondents

Data on the characteristics of 227 respondents in this study were dominated by respondents aged 16 to 20 years (38.32%), female (60.35%), domiciled in Kalimantan (61.25%), had Senior High School as the last education (51.1%). The majority of respondents had an income of Rp4,000,000 - Rp6,000,000 per month (11.01%), a monthly allowance of Rp1,000,000 - Rp1,500,000 per month (18.06%), and had used by.U for 1 year (34.37%).
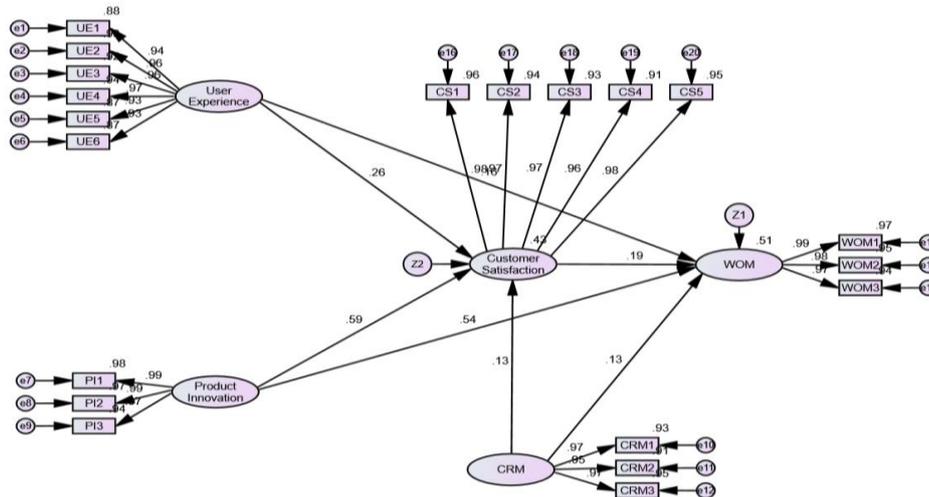

Figure 1. The research model design

Hypothesis Testing

The findings of this study's testing of the relationship between variables in the research framework can be summarized as follows.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H1	User_Experience --> Customer_Satisfaction	0.339	0.071	4.798	***
H2	Product_Innovation --> Customer_Satisfaction	0.781	0.086	9.05	***
H3	CRM --> Customer_Satisfaction	0.176	0.07	2.53	0.011
H4	User_Experience --> WOM	0.23	0.074	3.134	0.002
H5	Product_Innovation --> WOM	0.764	0.102	7.506	***
H6	CRM --> WOM	0.18	0.071	2.535	0.011
H7	Customer_Satisfaction --> WOM	0.201	0.07	2.857	0.004

Based on Table 1, the hypothesis test results can be considered valid if the t table or C.R value exceeds 1.96. The significance value (p-value) is less than 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$). Based on the data in the table presented above, it can be concluded that all proposed hypotheses have met all the criteria and are considered significant to influence directly.

To verify the indirect effect on the existing mediating variables, Table 2.2 contains the results of the Sobel test.

Table 2. Significance of mediation

	Sobel test statistic	Two- tailed probability
User_Experience --> Customer_Satisfaction --> WOM	2.4607187	0.0138659
Product_Innovation --> Customer_Satisfaction --> WOM	2.73783099	0.00618459
CRM --> Customer_Satisfaction --> WOM	1.89160973	0.058543

Based on the Sobel test results in Table 2, it can be seen that the Sobel test statistical value of H8 is 2.4607187 and the p-value is 0.0138659. These results indicate a significant indirect effect of the User Experience variable on WOM through Customer Satisfaction felt by Gen Z consumers at the digital provider

by.U so that the eighth hypothesis can be accepted. Something similar can also be seen from H9 with a Sobel test statistical value of 2.73783099 and a p-value of 0.00618459. From these results, Product Innovation is proven to have a significant indirect effect on WOM through Customer Satisfaction. On the other hand, the results show that Customer Satisfaction does not provide a mediating effect for CRM and WOM. This can be seen from the Sobel test value of 1.89160973, less than the minimum threshold value of 1.96. In addition, the p-value of the test results is 0.058543, exceeding the maximum accepted value of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the tenth hypothesis cannot be accepted.

Discussion

In this study, Customer Satisfaction was a mediating factor, while the effects of User Experience, Product Innovation, and Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth marketing were assessed. The results of the first hypothesis show that User Experience directly impacts Customer Satisfaction. A good User Experience is key to differentiating a product or service from competitors in a competitive business. By prioritizing User Experience, companies can increase Customer Satisfaction, strengthen customer relationships, and increase business success. This is reinforced by research findings from (Badran & Al-Haddad, 2018), (E. Park, 2022) and (Mamakou et al., 2023). In the second hypothesis, it can be proven that Product Innovation can affect Customer Satisfaction. This finding is strengthened by research from (Ayodele & Oluwayemi, 2019), (Winarti et al., 2021), and (Zghoul & Al-Haddad, 2021). The effect of Product Innovation on Customer Satisfaction can be seen from the ability of these innovations to provide new experiences and benefits for consumers. Product Innovation creates surprises, increases customer excitement, and forms a positive brand image, which can increase Customer Satisfaction. The third hypothesis, which states that Customer Relationship Management significantly affects Customer Satisfaction, can be confirmed by previous findings from (Elfarmawi, 2019) and (Dibyo et al., 2021). Furthermore, the fourth hypothesis test results show that Customer Satisfaction affects Word of Mouth. This finding is consistent with the findings of (Yun & Park, 2022) and (Sugiharto et al., 2023). This relationship occurs because when customers are satisfied with the products or services they receive, they share positive experiences with others, such as friends, family, and coworkers. Their motivation is to inspire others and share the satisfaction they have felt.

The results of the fifth hypothesis test state a significant relationship between User Experience and Word of mouth, which can be supported by the findings of (Negi & Kumar, 2019). Satisfied customers tend to provide positive feedback and reviews, which can help improve a business's reputation and credibility. As for the sixth hypothesis, Product Innovation can affect Word of Mouth, in line with the findings of (Purwanto et al., 2022). When a company introduces new and innovative products, it can create enthusiasm among consumers, resulting in marketing through positive Word of Mouth. The seventh hypothesis test proves that Customer Relationship Management can cause Word of Mouth. When a company builds positive relationships with its customers, this can result in positive Word of Mouth marketing. Satisfied customers tend to recommend the company's products or services to others, which can help attract new customers (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021).

In addition, the findings show that Customer Satisfaction can strengthen the positive effect of User Experience and Product Innovation on Word of Mouth. This can be seen from the eighth and ninth hypothesis test results. Findings from (Almohaimmeed, 2020) have strengthened the statement that a good User Experience can trigger positive Word of Mouth because satisfied customers often recommend the product or service to help others achieve a similar experience. The ninth hypothesis is supported by findings from (Amgad et al., 2021), which state that Customer Satisfaction acts as a mediator because successful innovation can increase customer satisfaction, trigger positive Word of Mouth, and help companies expand market share and improve brand image.

However, in the tenth hypothesis test, it was proven that the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction did not strengthen the effect of Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth. This is inversely proportional to the findings of (Miguel & Crespo, 2023). Based on previous research, other factors may have a stronger influence on WOM than Customer Satisfaction. (Javed, 2017) suggests that the perceived value received from customers by a product or service may be more important than their level of satisfaction in determining WOM behavior. Then, (Abbasi et al., 2018) suggested that perceived service fairness by customers can mediate the relationship between consumption emotions, service satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, including WOM. Another study (Wijaya et al., 2022) states that customer engagement can mediate the relationship between customer involvement, trust, and WOM. This implies that Customer Engagement can play a more significant role in promoting Word of Mouth than Customer Satisfaction alone. Therefore, the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction may not significantly strengthen the effect of

Customer Relationship Management on Word of Mouth. In other cases, these factors may impact Customer Relationship Management more than customer Word of Mouth behavior.

4.   Conclusion

This research conducts a thorough investigation to understand how User Experience, Product Innovation, and Customer Relationship Management collectively impact Word of Mouth (WOM) through the intermediary role of Customer Satisfaction, specifically in by.U, Indonesia's first digital service provider. The contribution of this research is to understand how customer satisfaction becomes a key driver in the formation of positive user feedback. The research findings can provide practical implications that can be used by businesses, marketers, and even by.U itself in developing business strategy. This includes recommendations to improve user experience, bring more attractive product innovations, and strengthen interactions through customer relationship management to increase customer satisfaction and encourage positive Word of Mouth.

The main finding is that User Experience and Product Innovation significantly influence WOM through Customer Satisfaction. The research revealed intriguing findings indicating that Customer Relationship Management does not significantly influence WOM through Customer Satisfaction. This could be attributed to the varied preferences and characteristics of digital users. The CRM offered by by.U might fall short in effectively addressing the diverse requirements and expectations of users. Strategies that do not align with customer needs or lack personalization may constrain CRM's capacity to shape customer satisfaction, subsequently impacting Word of Mouth. In addition, Product Innovation also plays an important role in increasing WOM through Customer Satisfaction. Product innovation, such as adding features or continuous development, makes customers feel more engaged and happy with by.U's services. This can encourage customers to give positive recommendations because they appreciate the company's efforts in providing ever-evolving solutions.

To increase the influence of Customer Relationship Management on WOM through Customer Satisfaction, by.U can take strategic steps such as evaluating and updating CRM strategies, training teams to improve service quality, and holding promotional initiatives to stimulate positive feedback. For future studies, researchers are advised to expand the sample, add additional variables that influence Word of Mouth, and measure positive and negative WOM separately. All these measures will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that influence Word of Mouth and Customer Satisfaction in the telecommunications industry, especially digital service providers.

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