The Influence of Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Quality of Services on the Purchase Decision of Training Services in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and service quality play an important role in influencing the decision to purchase training services in higher education. Customer Reference Group can provide informative and normative influence. Digital Marketing allows universities to reach a wider audience with digital media-based marketing strategies, such as social media, email, and websites, which can increase visibility and engagement. In this study, it includes aspects of accessibility, interactivity, entertainment, trust, irritation, and, finally, information. Service quality is a characteristic of a service that is able to satisfy customers better than competitor services, which includes aspects of reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and physical evidence. This study aims to analyze the effect of Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Quality of Services on purchasing decisions for ecc.co.id training services for universities in Indonesia. The research was conducted with a quantitative approach, involving 103 respondents consisting of lecturers, campus staff, career center managers, and other professionals who have used ecc.co.id training services. Data was collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression using SPSS 25. The results showed that the three independent variables had a positive and significant influence on the decision to purchase ecc.co.id training services. This study concludes that improving service quality, optimizing digital marketing strategies, and managing effective Customer Reference Groups are the keys to success in driving the decision to purchase training services by universities in Indonesia.

Keywords: Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, Quality Of Services, Training Service Purchase Decision.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and digitalization, competition in the higher education sector in Indonesia is intensifying (Mustafa & Komalasari, 2024). Universities must continue to innovate and improve the quality of their services, including training services, to meet the needs and expectations of students, staff, and the wider community. Quality training services not only improve participants' competencies and skills but also strengthen the reputation of the college in the eyes of prospective students and industry partners (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Job preparation training service providers alone in Indonesia are based on data from the old.

saturate.kemenaker.go.id (2024), there are a total of 2874, consisting of 2506 private training providers and 368 Government training providers. While the number of universities in Indonesia is based on data from pddikti.kemdikbud.go.id (2024), there are around 4406 universities in Indonesia.

Training services are important for universities due to the importance of developing the capacity of lecturers, staff, and students to stay updated with the needs of the times (Mustafa & Komalasari, 2024). Training helps lecturers improve their teaching competencies and adapt to new technologies. College management is also more efficient with training. Trained graduates are better prepared for the world of work. Their hard and soft skills improve. Professional certification training provides a competitive advantage. Industry-relevant training makes the curriculum more market-appropriate. Relationships with industry are also strengthened. Tracer study results are better because graduates are quickly absorbed in the job market. College reputation is enhanced through training. Training helps universities comply with government regulations and keep up with global trends. Learning innovations such as distance learning are more easily adopted. Collaboration between universities is strengthened. Training helps the college's sustainable growth. Relationships with industry are also strengthened. Graduates become better prepared to compete in the job market. Training enables universities to remain relevant and competitive.

Changes in consumer behavior in choosing training services in the digital era are strongly influenced by the adoption of information technology (IT) and rapidly evolving consumer habits (Eger et al., 2021). Access to digital information has changed the way consumers interact with training services. They are more likely to choose platforms that offer easy access, user-friendly navigation, and personalization based on user preferences. In addition, trust in data security has become important due to increased privacy awareness (Singh et al., 2024). Research also shows that e-commerce and digital purchasing trends have grown with the pandemic, forcing more consumers, including those from older generations, to turn to digital services (Jílková & Králová, 2021).

The decision to purchase training services is influenced not only by individual needs and goals but also by various external factors. One important factor is the Costumer Reference Group. Reference groups, which consist of friends, family, coworkers, and professional communities, can provide recommendations and testimonials that greatly influence a person's decision. Research from Ding, Lin & Zang (2020a) shows that reference groups have an important influence on individual beliefs, attitudes, and decisions. This influence is mainly based on the fact that individuals will take the group as a reference and comparison object in their self-evaluation so that the results of their behavior will be consistent with the reference group. It has shown that recommendations from trusted individuals can increase trust and reduce the risk perceived by potential customers in making purchasing decisions. Tolstoy, Melén Hånell, and Özbek (2022) state that customer reference marketing plays an important role in the internationalization strategy of SMEs in IT services. SMEs offering more differentiated services tend to rely more on customer reference marketing to build trust and credibility in new markets. In the context of services, since services are more difficult to communicate in the absence of tangible evidence or testimonials,

using customers as references becomes a very effective strategy. Proximity factor Indonesian universities have various communities, including the Career Learning Community promoted by ECC.co.id and the Indonesia Career Center Network, which is a community consisting of Higher Education Career Centers in Indonesia. There are also many professional organizations that accommodate lecturers from universities in Indonesia. Apart from the above communities, lecturers and staff also build friendships and professional relationships informally, which allows for the exchange of information (Lecat et al., 2019). One of them is information about training services needed by universities in Indonesia. ECC.co.id itself is a consulting agency that provides Talent Development services (Training and Counseling) and Talent Acquisition services (Selection and Recruitment), where one of ECC's customers is universities in Indonesia.

In addition, digital marketing has become a vital tool in attracting and retaining customers in the digital age. With various digital platforms such as social media, email, and websites, colleges can reach a wider audience and interact with them more effectively (Saleem et al., 2023). The right digital marketing strategy can increase the visibility of training services, build brand awareness, and create strong engagement with potential trainees. Indonesia alone has 185.3 million Internet users, which is 66.5% of the total population. The number of internet users in Indonesia continues to increase rapidly. Compared to 2023, the number of users in the country increased by 1.8 million (+0.8%) in 2024. Indonesians spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes on the internet every day (Zuhri & Ridanasti, 2024). The following is an overview of the users of each social media in Indonesia.

Figure 1: Number of Social Media Users in Indonesia
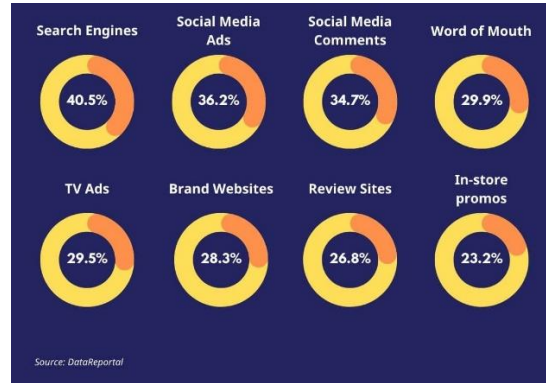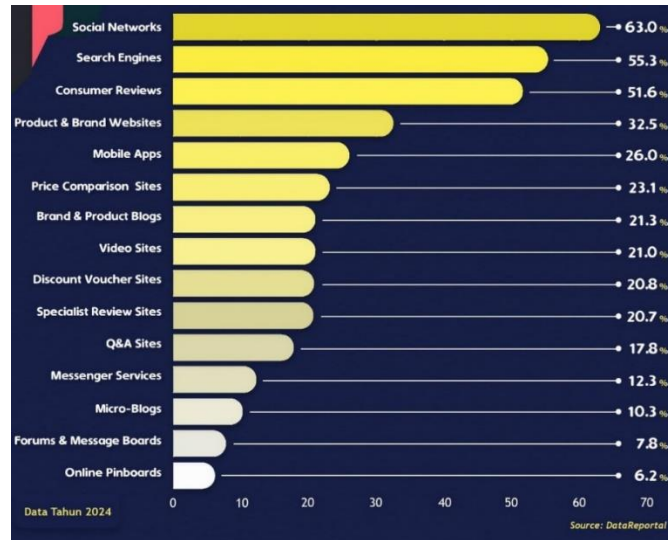Source: www.blog.slice.id, 2024

Figure 2. Media Used by Users to Discover New Brands or Services
Source: www.blog.slice.id, 2024

Figure 3. User-Used Media
For Researching New Products or Services
Source: www.blog.slice.id, 2024

The digital marketing strategy itself that has been used by ECC.co.id is social media marketing using Instagram ads, etc.co.id website, where each offers its services in the form of training services, e-courses, online assessments, and selection and recruitment services. Email marketing is also used by ecc.co.id using the ecc.co.id client database. Video marketing containing documentation and testimonials is also shared using the ecc.co.id Youtube channel.

Equally important is the Quality of Services offered to the college as a customer. Quality of services covers various aspects, such as instructor competence, relevant curriculum, adequate facilities, and responsive support services (Stronge, 2018). High service quality can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty and encourage them to recommend the service to others. Training services themselves at ecc.co.id as an institution that provides training services to educational institutions for lecturers, students, or graduates. During the period 2020 to. 2023, the satisfaction survey results from 1380 training participants were above 90% (moderate, satisfied, and very satisfied categories) both for quality, material, and trainers.
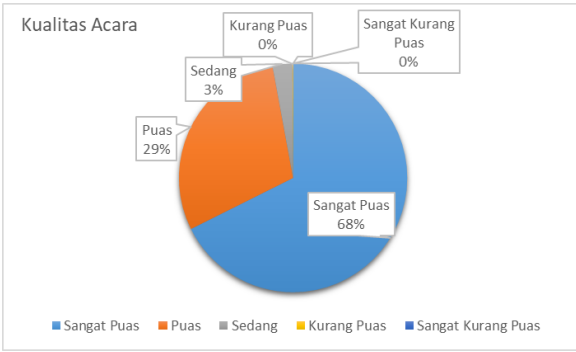
**Figure 4. ecc.co.id Training Service
Satisfaction Diagram (Quality)**
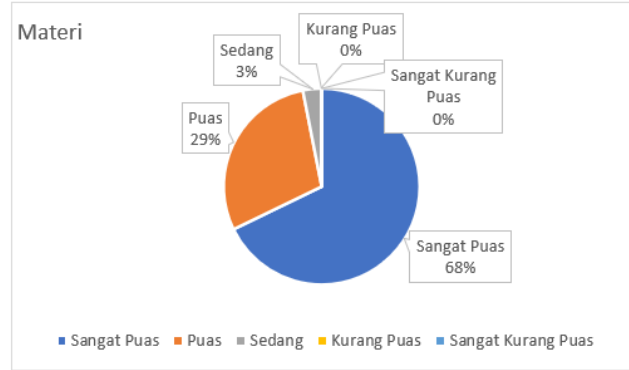*Source:* internal data ecc.co.id

**Figure 5. ecc.co.id Training Service
Satisfaction Diagram (Material)**
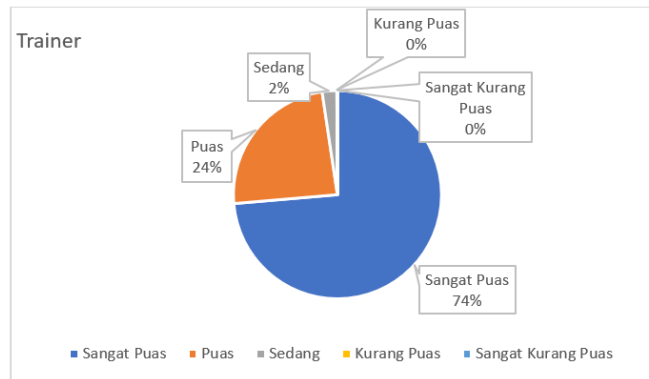*Source:* internal data ecc.co.id

Figure 6. ecc.co.id Training Service Satisfaction Diagram (Trainer)
Source: internal data ecc.co.id

Training services at ecc.co.id itself has a target customer of Higher Education institutions. Where there are various themes that are mainly related to career preparation, and soft skills provision. The ecc.co.id training service in terms of how often customers use training services from 2021 to 2023 can be described as follows:

Table 1. Training service data ecc.co.id Year. 2021- 2023

Year	2021	2022	2023
Number of Training Services/year	53	48	49

Source: Ecc.co.id internal data

Here, it can be seen that ecc.co.id training services in 2021 were 53 training services provided to customers, while in 2022, there was a decrease because training services were only used as many as 48. In 2023, the number of training services used was 49 services. Here it can be seen that the use of training services tends to be stagnant in its development from 2021 to 2023. On the other hand, etc.co.id training services still have the potential to be developed again, considering the number of universities in Indonesia alone is 4406 institutions (addict.kemdikbud.go.id, 2024).

However, while the influence of Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Quality of Services is widely recognized, there is limited in-depth research on the interaction and influence of these three factors on training service purchase decisions in Indonesian higher education (Ambarwati & Sari, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore how these three factors contribute to shaping the purchase decision of training services in higher education. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for educational institutions to enhance their marketing strategies, improve service quality, and effectively engage with customer reference groups to drive better outcomes in training service offerings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research design will use quantitative methods. The population in this study consists of lecturers, campus staff, or managers of career centers in Indonesia who have used ecc.co.id training services. Based on data on ecc.co.id training service users from 2020 to 2024, there are approximately 450 lecturers, teaching staff, and career center managers from various universities in Indonesia who have used ecc.co.id training services. In this study, the sample to be taken is lecturers, teaching staff, or managers of career centers of universities in Indonesia who have used training services from ecc.co.id. The total number of lecturers and tender staff from universities in Indonesia who have used ecc.co.id training services is 450 people. To determine the number of samples, the authors refer to Hair et al. (2019), where it is recommended that the minimum sample size for regression analysis is 50 plus the number of predictors used so that the total sample used is at least 53 samples.

The type of data used is quantitative data, which will be distributed through an online questionnaire. Where in each questionnaire, there will be items that will measure customer reference groups, digital marketing strategies that reach customers, service quality in customer perceptions, and decisions to purchase training services by consumers. The data sources used are lecturers, tender staff, and managers of career center agencies that use ECC.co.id training services. The data analysis method used is the Classical Assumption Test and Hypothesis testing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Classical Assumption Test
Normality Test

Table 1. Normality Test

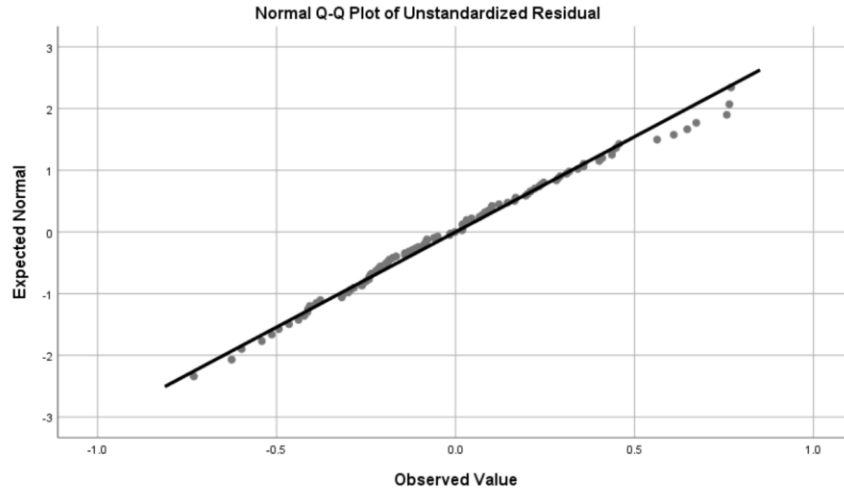| Test of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Unstandardized Residual	.054	103	.200*	.987	103	.450
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.						
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Normality Test

Based on the table data and scatter plot below, it indicates that the data used in this study has a significance of p=0.450 (p>0.05) so it can be said that the data is normally distributed.

Multicollinearity Test

Table 2. Multicollinearity Test

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Correlations Zero-order	Part ial	Pa rt	Collinearity Statistics Toler ance	VI F
1	(Constant)	.298	.400		74 6	.4 57					
	Service Quality	.338	.084	.333	4.0 24	.0 00	.505	375	.2 89	.754	1.3 26
	DGM	.245	.104	.225	2.3 57	.0 20	.575	.23 0	16 9	.566	1.7 65
	CRG	.337	.079	.361	4.2 70	.0 00	.536	.39 4	.3 06	.720	1.3 89

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision

Based on the table above, it is known that the tolerance value of each independent variable is >0.10, which indicates that there is no multicollinearity, while the VIF value is also <10, so it can be said that each variable passes the multicollinearity test.

Heteroscedasticity Test

Table 3. Glesjer Heteroscedasticity Test

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	7.976E-16	.400		.000	1.000
	CRG	.000	.079	.000	.000	1.000
	DGM	.000	.104	.000	.000	1.000
	Service Quality	.000	.084	.000	.000	1.000

Coefficients[a]					
Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
a. Dependents Variable: Abs_Res					

Source: Primary Data 2024

From this table for the three independent variables, namely Costumer Reference Group, digital marketing, and service quality, all have p>0.05 so it can be said that the heterosdasticity test is passed. All independent variables have no significant effect on the absolute error.

Hypothesis Test

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test Results

Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	.298	.400		.746	.457
	Service Quality	.338	.084	.333	4.024	.000
	DGM	.245	.104	.225	2.357	.020
	CRG	.337	.079	.361	4.270	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision						

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Based on this table, the regression equation that can be made in this study is:

$$Y = 0.298 + 0.338X1 + 0.245X2 + 0.337X3$$

With the following information:

X1 = Independent Variable Costumer Reference Group

X2 = Independent Variable Digital Marketing

X3 = Independent Variable Service Quality

Y = Dependent Variable Purchasing Decision of ecc.co.id Training Service

The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable can be explained as follows:

a. The constant value is 0.298. If the Customer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Service Quality variables do not exist or are equal to 0, then the Purchase Decision for ecc.co.id Training Services is 0.298.

b. The Beta value of the Costumer Reference Group variable (X1) of +0.338 indicates that the Costumer Reference Group has a positive effect on the decision to purchase ecc.co.id training services.

c. The Beta value of the Digital Marketing variable (X2) of +0.245 indicates that Digital Marketing has a positive effect on purchasing decisions for ecc.co.id training services.

d. The Beta value of the Service Quality variable (X3) of +0.337 indicates that Service Quality has a positive effect on Purchasing Decisions for ecc.co.id Training Services.

Test Results of the Coefficient of Determination (R2)

Table 5. Determination Coefficient Test

Model Summary[b]				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.700[a]	.490	.475	.328921

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
a. Predictors: (Constant). CRG, Service Quality, DGM				
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision				

From this table it can be seen that R Square is 0.490 which indicates that 49.0% of the ecc.co.id Training Service Purchasing Decision is influenced by the Costumer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Service Quality variables, while as much as 51% is influenced by other variables.

F Test Results

The results of the F test can be shown in the table below:

Table 6. F-test

ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	10.305	3	3.435	3.435	.000[b]
Residuals	10.711	99	.108		
Total	21.016	102			
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision					
b. Predictors: (Constant), CRG, Service Quality, DGM					

The F test is used to determine whether simultaneously (simultaneously) all independent variables (Customer Reference Group variables, Digital Marketing variables, and Service Quality variables), have an influence on the dependent variable (decision to purchase ecc.co.id training services), which is as follows:

a. If the value of F count > F table or sig < a, then H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted.

b. If the value of F count < F table or sig > a, then Ha is rejected, and H0 is accepted.

Based on the F table, for a sample size of 103 and there are 3 independent variables, the F table is 2.696. While F count is 31.751, this indicates that F Count> F Table, so H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted. The significance obtained in this test is 0.000 <0.05, which indicates the test results are significant. This shows that the Costumer Reference Group, Digital Marketing, and Service Quality variables have a significant influence on the Purchase Decision of ecc.co.id Training Services.

Results of the t-test

Table 7. The t-test

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.298	.400		.746	.457
Service Quality	.338	.084	.333	4.024	.000
DGM	.245	.104	.225	2.357	.020
CRG	.337	.079	.361	4.270	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision					

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The calculated t-values for each variable are 4.024 (X1), 2.357 (X2), and 4, 270 (X3). While the t table value is 1.984, so the calculated t value of each variable> t table. Second, the significance values are all <0.05, which indicates that H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted. The conclusion is:

a. The Costumer Reference Group variable has a significant influence on the decision to purchase ecc.co.id training services.
b. Digital Marketing variables have a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions for ecc.co.id Training Services
c. Service Quality variables have a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions for ecc.co.id Training Services

Customer Reference Group on Purchasing Decisions for Training Services

In the hypothesis test using the t-test, the Costumer Reference Group variable has a t value> than the t table, so Ho is rejected, and Ha is accepted (Limakrisna & Ali, 2016). The significance also shows that p <0.05. It can be concluded that the Costumer Reference Group in this study has a significant positive influence on the Purchase Decision of ecc.co.id Training Services.

This research is in line with several studies conducted previously with similar themes, namely in research conducted by Alarsali & Aghei (2021) related to purchasing decisions for pharmaceutical drugs and Ding, Lin & Zang (2020b) related to purchasing decisions for IT services. Another study by Qalati et al. (2019) conveyed in more detail that support from family and friends plays an important role in consumer purchasing decisions. Indriyani & Irawati (2023) also, in their research, prove the influence of the customer reference Group and service quality on purchasing decisions for valve products. All of the research results above show how customer or customer reference groups influence product or service purchasing decisions. Another study by Tolstoy, Melén Hånell, and Özbek (2022) stated that customer reference marketing plays an important role in the internationalization strategy of SMEs in IT services. This research shows that marketing strategies through customer references have an important role for SMEs, where ecc.co.id is also still included in the SME or Small and Medium Enterprises category. The results of this study further strengthen how customer reference groups have an influence on service purchase decisions, specifically services in the form of training services (Zirena-Bejarano & Zirena, 2024).

Digital Marketing on Purchasing Decisions for Training Services

The digital marketing variable shows that it has a significant positive influence on the decision to purchase ecc.co.id training services. This is an opportunity considering that Indonesia itself has 185.3 million Internet users in Indonesia, which is 66.5% of the total population. The number of internet users in Indonesia continues to increase rapidly. Compared to 2023, the number of users in the country increased by 1.8 million (+0.8%) in 2024. Indonesians spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes on the internet every day (Zuhri & Ridanasti, 2024). It is expected that with the right digital marketing strategy, the opportunity to expand the market share of ecc.co.id training service users will be wider, in an easier and cheaper way, namely through digital marketing.

Research on the same subject was also conducted by Oman and Atteya (2022), who defined digital marketing as marketing using electronic media such as personal computers, smartphones,

cellphones, and game consoles to involve stakeholders in a procedure. This research wants to see the effect of digital marketing on customer buying decisions. The results of this study show that email marketing has a significant influence on customer buying decisions in the post-purchase phase and during information search (Desku & Sadrija, 2023). Retargeting will be very influential in the evaluation phase in the Egyptian market. The research conducted by the author further strengthens the results of previous research, which shows that digital marketing has a significant positive influence on purchasing decisions for ecc.co.id training services.

Service Quality on Purchasing Decisions for Training Services

The last independent variable that wants to be seen in this study is the service quality variable. The hypothesis in the study is significantly proven, which is that the quality of ecc.co.id training services has an influence on purchasing decisions for ecc.co.id training services. Previous research that took a similar topic was the research of Romadlon et al. (2020), which also shows that there is a positive and significant influence between product quality and intention to buy. Aspects such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and physical evidence (tangibles) are important aspects that are seen to see the quality of a service or product (Fandy Tjiptono and Gregorius Chandra (2011) in Indriyani (2023). All of these aspects are also used in this research questionnaire, which shows the importance of maintaining the reliability or trustworthiness of the trainees both to the material and the presenters. Then responsiveness is also important, where in this aspect and friendliness become an advantage in the quality of ecc.co.id training services, so that it gets a higher average point than other aspects, which shows that this point is positively perceived by ecc.co.id training service participants.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the effect of the customer reference group, digital marketing, and service quality on purchasing decisions for ecc.co.id training services using multiple linear regression methods with 103 respondents, including lecturers, career center managers, tend staff, and other professionals. The results showed that the three variables, individually and collectively, had a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. The customer reference group contributes through a positive image conveyed by the education community. Digital marketing proves effective in reaching a wide market among thousands of universities in Indonesia, and service quality is a crucial factor in maintaining repeat purchases. Based on these findings, ECC is advised to strengthen relationships with college communities, such as ICCN, to capitalize on the customer referral effect. Digital marketing strategies should be optimized through channels that align with the main targets, such as lecturers and career center managers. Furthermore, maintaining service quality in terms of responsiveness, friendliness, and trust remains a priority to retain customers and encourage repeat purchases of ecc.co.id training services.

Future research could explore additional factors influencing purchasing decisions, such as pricing strategies, promotional offers, or customer satisfaction, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior. Comparative studies between different regions or user demographics could also offer insights into tailoring strategies for diverse markets. Additionally,

qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, may uncover nuanced perspectives on service improvement and customer expectations.

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