

## The Drivers of Partner Satisfaction in Affiliate Marketing: An Application of the SERVQUAL Model

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how SERVQUAL service quality dimensions influence affiliate partner satisfaction in an affiliate marketing network. A cross-sectional survey of 333 partners of Omega Media Worldwide JSC (2025) from India, China, Vietnam, UEA and other countries was analyzed using multiple linear regression. Reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles showed positive, significant effects on satisfaction, jointly explaining 77% of the variance. Assurance and empathy were the strongest predictors, with empathy indicating scope for improvement. The findings suggest that transparent, reliable systems and more personalized communications enhance satisfaction and loyalty. The study extends SERVQUAL to B2B affiliate marketing in an emerging market.

**Keywords:** Affiliate marketing, Partner satisfaction, Service quality, SERVQUAL, B2B services

### INTRODUCTION:

The advent of advanced technologies has profoundly reshaped customer preferences, leading to a significant increase in digital transactions and online interactions (Adiningtyas & Auliani, 2024). In this dynamic environment, business models like e-commerce and affiliate marketing have experienced rapid growth, becoming crucial channels for brand promotion and customer engagement (Ballestar et al., 2018). Affiliate marketing, a performance-based approach, allows brands to pay only when a sale can be traced back to a specific affiliate, making it a powerful and widely used online marketing strategy (Mangiò & Di Domenico, 2022; Syrdal et al., 2023). The success of this model is intricately linked to effective customer acquisition and the cultivation of loyalty among existing customers, often boosted by word-of-mouth recommendations (Ballestar et al., 2018).

While the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is well-established in traditional and Business-to-Customer (B2C) e-commerce contexts, a significant gap remains in understanding this dynamic within the unique Business-to-Business (B2B) ecosystem of affiliate marketing. Specifically, prior literature has not adequately addressed how affiliate partners, who function as business clients rather than end-consumers, perceive service quality from network platforms. This study addresses this gap by applying the service quality (SERVQUAL) model to investigate which service quality dimensions, including Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy, are the most

critical drivers of satisfaction for affiliate partners. This perspective is crucial for network sustainability and success yet remains underexplored.

This paper aims to bridge this gap by examining the current level of affiliate marketing service quality at Omega Media Worldwide JSC and assessing its impact on customer satisfaction, based on direct customer feedback. The study also proposed evidence-based strategies to improve service quality and effectiveness in affiliate marketing. By addressing these objectives, this research contributes valuable insights for practitioners aiming to enhance customer loyalty and maintain a competitive edge in the digital marketplace (Ballestar et al., 2018), entrepreneurship and innovation (Liguori et al., 2024).

### Literature review and theoretical framework

Understanding customer satisfaction and its antecedents is critical for businesses striving for long-term success and profitability (Syrdal et al., 2023). This section reviews key theoretical concepts that underpin the relationship between service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction in digital and service-oriented contexts.

#### *Defining the "Customer" in affiliate marketing: the affiliate partner*

In this study, the term "customer" refers specifically to the affiliate partners (also known as publishers) who use the platform and services provided by Omega Media Worldwide JSC. This distinction is critical. Unlike end-consumers who purchase products, affiliate partners are business clients engaged in a B2B relationship with the

affiliate network. Their satisfaction is not derived from a final product, but from the quality of the service infrastructure, including the reliability of tracking systems, the timeliness of commission payments, and the responsiveness of support staff that enables them to run their own marketing activities effectively. Therefore, understanding the drivers of affiliate partner satisfaction is important for the network's ability to attract, retain, and motivate a high-performing partner base.

### ***Affiliate partner satisfaction***

Affiliate Partner Satisfaction can be defined as a partner's emotional and psychological response arising when the perceived performance of a product or service aligns with or surpasses their initial expectations. It represents the consumer's fulfillment response, indicating the degree to which that fulfillment is pleasant or unpleasant (adapted from Briggs et al., 2010; Sengupta et al., 2025). High levels of satisfaction yield numerous benefits, including enhanced brand reputation, reduced customer switching tendencies, and increased loyalty (Syrdal et al., 2023). Theoretical frameworks such as the expectancy-value concept and the disconfirmation paradigm are commonly used to explain customer satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2024). These theories suggest that customers compare the actual quality of a service or product against their initial expectations; positive dissonance (performance exceeding expectations) leads to higher satisfaction (Khan et al., 2024). In online environments, e-satisfaction is accepted as a direct antecedent of e-loyalty (Vakulenko et al., 2022).

### ***Service quality***

Service quality is recognized as a foundational determinant of customer satisfaction. It encompasses both service outputs and the processes of service performance (Khan et al., 2024). The SERVQUAL model, developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1988), is a widely adopted framework for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality, with five key dimensions. Reliability: The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Khan et al., 2024). Tangibles: The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials (Khan et al., 2024). Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Khan et al., 2024). Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Khan et al., 2024). Empathy: The caring, individualized attention provided to customers (Khan et al., 2024).

While initially designed for traditional services, this study explores its application in the digital B2B context of affiliate marketing. It is acknowledged that specific e-service quality (e-SQ) models, such as E-S-QUAL (Parasuraman et al., 2005) exist and incorporate dimensions such as efficiency and system availability. However, as an exploratory investigation into the B2B partner relationship, the foundational dimensions of SERVQUAL provide a robust starting point for understanding the core human and systemic elements of service delivery that drive partner satisfaction.

### ***Affiliate marketing and customer behavior***

Affiliate marketing involves customers profiting from transactions on affiliate websites, and its success relies heavily on combining traditional marketing with word-of-mouth recommendations, which boost new customer acquisition and strengthen existing customer loyalty (Fakhreddin et al., 2025); (Ballestar et al., 2018). Influencer marketing, a significant aspect of affiliate marketing, involves compensating individuals for promoting products or services online (Li et al., 2025). Research indicates that certain linguistic styles, such as those conveying clout, authenticity, and positive emotional tone, can enhance engagement with influencer affiliate marketing content, while analytical language and post length can negatively impact it (Syrdal et al., 2023).

Social media platforms play a critical role, allowing users to voice their perceptions and influencing customer perceived value (Adiningtyas & Auliani, 2024). Customer reviews are a crucial part of e-servicescape, positively affecting consumer trust, which in turn influences electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intentions and customer loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Behavioral engagement on social media, such as customer ratings and "likes," is also vital, reflecting product/service quality evaluations and strengthening brand relationships (Sengupta et al., 2025).

### ***Research model and hypotheses***

The research investigated how the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model directly affected affiliate partners' satisfaction with services at Omega Media Worldwide JSC. The five independent variables were all hypothesized to have a positive effect on partner satisfaction:

Reliability (H1): Refers to the ability to consistently deliver promised services, including commitments related to service provision, problem resolution, and pricing. It is crucial for establishing trust, increasing certainty, and is considered a primary driver of partner satisfaction and long-term relationships. Reliability positively affects affiliate partner satisfaction.

Assurance (H2): Encompasses employees' skills, knowledge, and attitudes, directly impacting trust and satisfaction. It helps reduce perceived risk, especially in intangible service industries, and is key to fostering partner loyalty and long-term relationships. Assurance positively affects affiliate partner satisfaction.

Empathy (H3): Involves the provider's capacity to deliver personalized care and attention to partner concerns. When they feel listened to, respected, and genuinely cared for, it fosters positive, lasting relationships that lead to greater satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Empathy positively affects affiliate partner satisfaction.

Responsiveness (H4): Reflects the willingness and promptness to assist and respond to partner requests. It demonstrates the provider's commitment to timely and effective service, reducing partner frustration and enhancing the overall experience by making partners feel valued. Responsiveness positively affects affiliate partner satisfaction.

Tangibles (H5): Represent the physical aspects customers can observe or interact with, such as physical facilities, equipment, employee appearance, and communication

materials. These elements are crucial for shaping partner perceptions, first impressions, and assessing service quality and professionalism. Tangibles positively affect affiliate partner satisfaction.

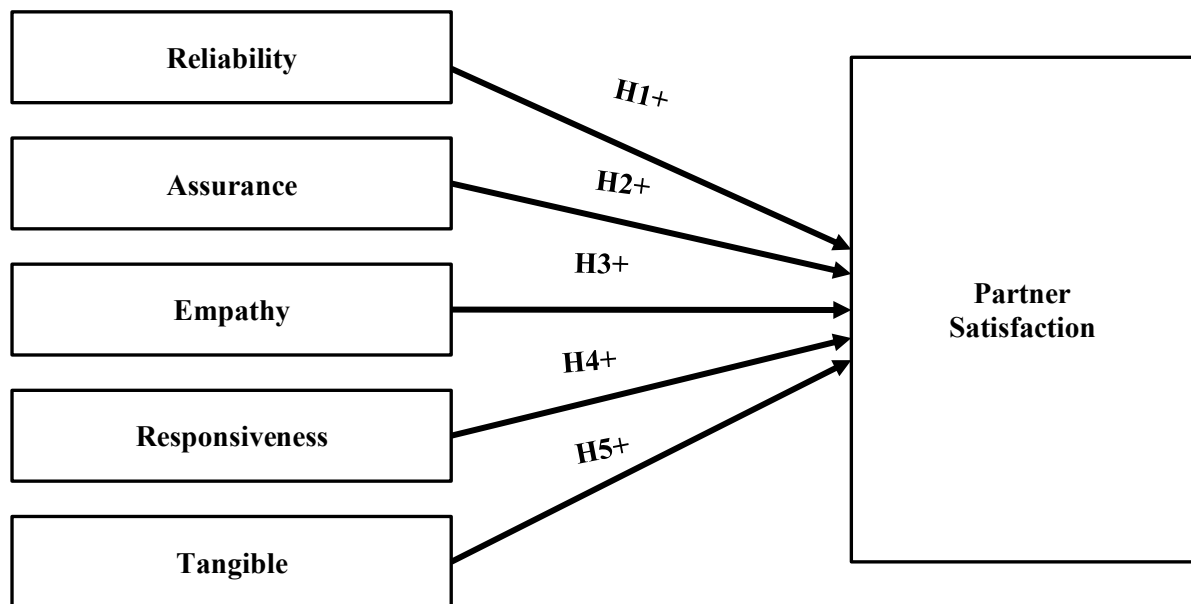


Figure 1. Research model

### Research design and methodology

To investigate the influence of service quality on partner satisfaction in affiliate marketing, this study adopted a cross-sectional design, with a quantitative research approach, leveraging structured questionnaires and analytical modeling.

#### Data collection and sample size

The primary data for this study were collected via an online survey targeting affiliate partners who have previously used or are currently using Omega Media Worldwide JSC's affiliate marketing services. Respondents from different countries worldwide were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, based on their availability and direct experience with the company's services. This method was chosen due to practical constraints of time and access to a complete sampling frame. However, this approach limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific sample studied. A total of 350 respondents of whom 333 valid responses were obtained. The sample size was consistent with other studies in the field of service quality and customer satisfaction. Regarding participants' consent, they agreed to participate in the survey voluntarily and to be informed on the survey form of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection without consequences.

#### Measurement

The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: demographic information and measurement items. The measurement items assessed partner satisfaction with the service quality of Omega Media Worldwide JSC using a

five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5= Strongly agree). The evaluation focused on the five key dimensions of the SERVQUAL model.

#### Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 27 and AMOS 24 to explore how various service quality factors influence affiliate partner satisfaction through multiple linear regression. Before the primary analysis, scale reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, and multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values falling within acceptable thresholds ( $VIF < 5$ ). The suitability of the multiple linear regression model was assessed. The regression analysis identified the impact of each service quality dimension (Reliability, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Tangibility) on partner satisfaction.

#### Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was not required, but participants were provided with information appear on the survey form stating that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection without consequences. Data was anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and followed STROBE guidelines for reporting observational studies.

### Results

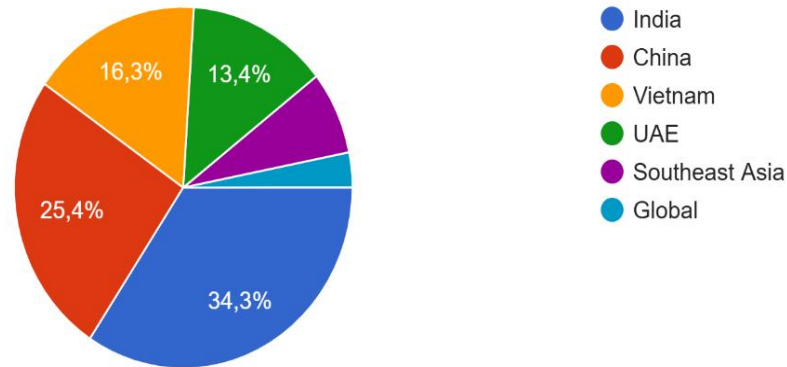
#### General characteristics of study participants

A total of 350 respondents (52.6% males and 47.4% females) from India (34.3%), China (25.4%), Vietnam (16.3%), USA (13.4%), and 10.6% from other countries

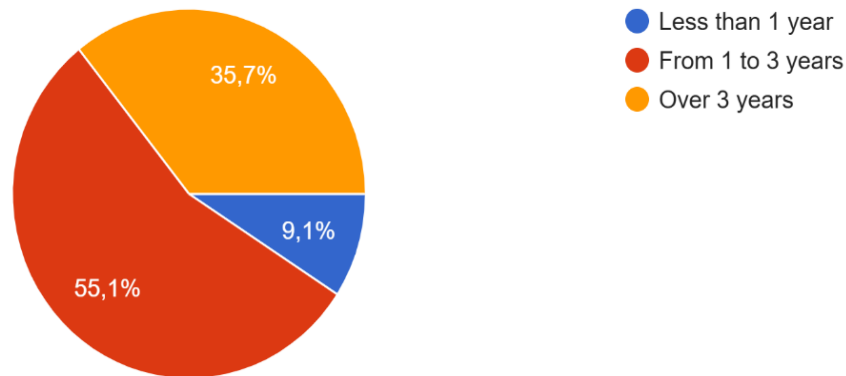
in Southeast Asia and globally participated in this study, of whom 333 valid responses were obtained for data analysis (Figure 2). Most of the participants (55.1%) have been working with Omega Media Worldwide JSC for one

to three years, 35.7% of participants have been working with the company for over three years, while a small proportion (9.1%) had less than one year of experience with the company (Figure 3).

**Figure 2. Countries where participants' company were currently operated**



**Figure 3. Working experiences of participants at the Omega Media Worldwide JSC**



***The reliability and multiple linear regression analysis***

The Reliability: All variables demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.6. Specifically, Responsibility (RE) had the value of 0.88, Assurance (AS) had 0.89, Empathy (EM) had 0.85, Responsiveness (RES) had 0.86, Tangibility (TA) had 0.89, and Affiliate Partner Satisfaction (APS) had 0.82. These values ensure the reliability of the measurement scales.

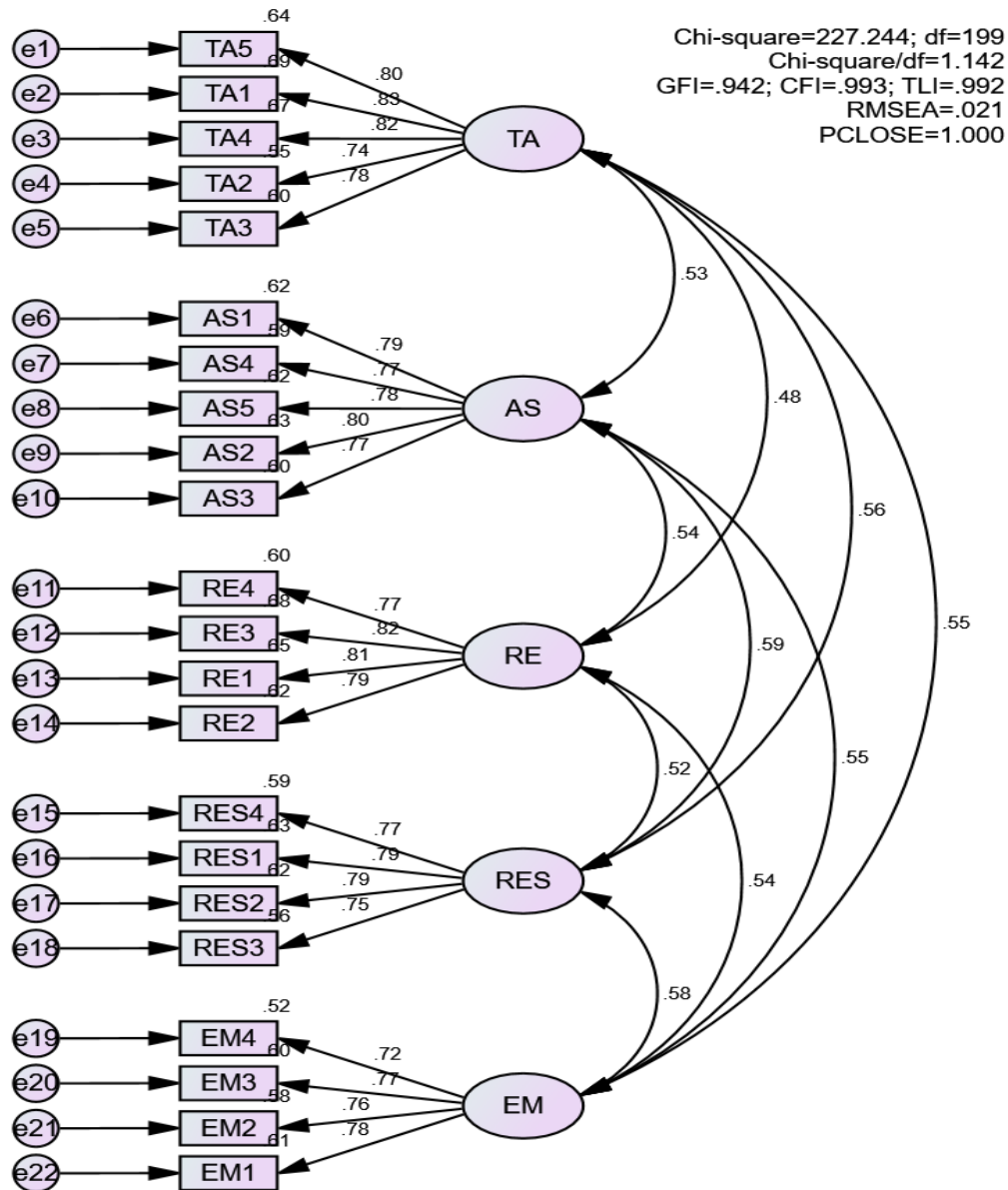
**Table 1. Cronbach's alpha test**

Variables	Conbach's Alpha	N of items	Note
RE	.88	4	ok
AS	.89	5	ok
EM	.85	4	ok
RES	.86	4	ok
TA	.89	5	ok
APS	.82	3	ok

Note: RE is Responsibility, AS is Assurance, EM is Empathy, RES is Responsiveness, TA is Tangibility, and APS is Affiliate Partner Satisfaction.

To assess model fit, the CFA was analyzed using five independent variables (Reliability, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Tangibles). The results have shown a good model fit for these variables; Chi-square/df=1.142 ( $\leq 3$ ), CFI=.993 ( $\geq 0.9$ ), GFI=.942 ( $\geq 0.9$ ), TLI=.992 ( $\geq 0.9$ ), RMSEA=.021 ( $\leq 0.06$ ), PCLOSE=1.000 ( $\geq 0.05$ ) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The model fits



The multiple linear regression analysis revealed that all five independent variables (Reliability, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Tangibles) exerted positive and statistically significant effects on affiliate partner satisfaction (Sig. < .001). The regression equation was determined as:

$$APS = -0.443 + 0.197RE + 0.269AS + 0.256EM + 0.214RES + 0.224TA + \alpha$$

(Where APS = Affiliate Partner Satisfaction).

In this model, Assurance (AS) and Empathy (EM) were identified as the most influential factors. The model

explained 77% of the variance in partner satisfaction (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.771$ ), confirming its robustness. The negative constant (-0.443) suggested a baseline level of dissatisfaction if all service quality dimensions were perceived as non-existent, highlighting the necessity of these factors.

Based on the significance levels (Sig. < 0.05) as presented in Table 2, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were supported. Assurance (F\_AS) had the strongest impact on APS, with a standardized Beta coefficient of 0.264

**Table 2. Linear regression analysis APS**

Independent variable	APS		Hypothesis testing	Conclude
	Standardized Beta	Sig.		
F_RE	0.205	0.001	H1	Accepted
F_AS	0.264	0.001	H2	Accepted
F_EM	0.248	0.001	H3	Accepted
F_RES	0.209	0.001	H4	Accepted
F_TA	0.226	0.001	H5	Accepted
Value R <sup>2</sup>	0.771			
R <sup>2</sup> correction	0.768			
Durbin-Watson value	1.778			
Value of F	220.797			
Value of p	0.001			
Variance Inflation Factor VIF	1.501 ~ 1.658			

Further insights from the study revealed that customers rated Assurance as the most valued factor, directly contributing to their trust and confidence. Conversely, Reliability was identified as an area requiring greater attention, with customers expressing a desire for more careful listening, a better understanding of individual needs, and sincere care in interactions.

## DISCUSSION

The findings align with and were supported by results from other empirical studies on service quality and customer satisfaction: In community pharmacies, medicine supply ( $\beta = 0.43$ ), communication and attitude ( $\beta = 0.22$ ), and pharmacy environment ( $\beta = 0.26$ ) were significant positive predictors of satisfaction (Gül et al., 2023). In the healthcare sector, reliability (0.550) and responsiveness (0.160) had direct effects on patient satisfaction (Meesala & Paul, 2018). In banking, assurance (0.567) had the highest impact on consumers' service satisfaction, while empathy (-0.350) showed a negative impact (Khan et al., 2024). Studies on e-commerce have also confirmed that information quality and service quality are strong indicators of consumer satisfaction (Ma, 2021).

These findings indicate the critical importance of service quality in shaping affiliate partner satisfaction. The prominence of Assurance and Empathy underscores the partner's need for reliability and trustworthiness in affiliate marketing interactions, as well as prompt, efficient service delivery. In a performance-based industry where trust in commission tracking and timely

payments is crucial, this finding is particularly salient. Interestingly, our finding that all five SERVQUAL dimensions significantly and positively impact satisfaction contrasts with research in other service contexts. For instance, Meesala & Paul (2018) found that in a hospital setting, empathy, tangibility, and assurance were not significant predictors of patient satisfaction. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2024) reported a significant negative correlation between empathy and customer satisfaction in the context of digital banking in Bangladesh. This divergence suggests that the nature of the service relationship is a critical contextual factor. In the B2B affiliate marketing partnership, where success is co-dependent, dimensions such as Assurance (trust in the system's fairness and accuracy) and Empathy (personalized support from affiliate managers) may become more fundamentally important than in more transactional B2C service encounters. The adverse effect of empathy in digital banking, for example, might reflect a customer preference for efficient, impersonal transactions. In contrast, an affiliate partner requires a supportive, understanding relationship to resolve complex tracking or payment issues.

### Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. Contextualizing SERVQUAL for B2B digital services: It provides empirical evidence of the SERVQUAL model's applicability in the nascent academic domain of affiliate marketing services, specifically from a B2B partner perspective. Highlighting key dimensions for B2B Partnerships: By identifying Assurance and Empathy as the most influential factors, the study offers nuanced insights into which dimensions are most critical for

partner satisfaction, suggesting a prioritization for theoretical models in this niche. Contextualizing customer experience: This helps understand the partner experience in rapidly evolving digital business models, particularly how perceived service quality translates into satisfaction when technology mediates most interactions. This extends research on e-satisfaction and perceived value in online settings (El-Adly & Eid, 2016).

### **Practical implications**

The findings offer several actionable recommendations for affiliate marketing companies and other digital service providers. Firstly, prioritize assurance and empathy: Companies like Omega Media Worldwide JSC should invest heavily in strategies that build partner trust, such as transparent reporting, consistent communication, and efficient payment processes. Secondly, enhance reliability in partner management: Recognizing the identified need for greater reliability, companies should train their affiliate managers to actively listen, understand individual partner challenges, and provide genuinely caring support. Thirdly, optimize service communication: As seen in studies of e-wallets, analyzing customer perceptions on social media can improve services by identifying emotional, social, and quality values (Adiningtyas & Auliani, 2024). Affiliate marketing platforms can also utilize text mining and sentiment analysis of user-generated content to gain real-time insights into customer needs and sentiments, enabling proactive service adjustments. Fourthly, personalize strategies: Tailoring messaging to align with customer needs is essential (Rehman et al., 2025). Leveraging Customer Relationship Management (CRM) data (Fakhreddin et al., 2025) can help deliver personalized experiences by understanding customer preferences and service history, thereby strengthening relationships with repeat customers (Rehman et al., 2025). Finally, focus on post-purchase experience: Improving after-sales services is crucial for cultivating brand loyalty (Rehman et al., 2025). Even in affiliate marketing, the post-transaction support and experience provided to affiliates themselves and, by extension, their referred customers significantly impacts overall satisfaction and long-term relationships. It suggests that companies adapt their consumer review management strategy to the regulatory orientation of their target market and products (Kordrostami et al., 2021).

### **Limitations and future research**

The primary limitation of this study is the use of a nonprobability convenience sample from a single company, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study employed the traditional SERVQUAL model, which may not fully capture all nuances of a digitally mediated service.

Future research could expand on these findings by employing probability sampling across multiple affiliate networks to enhance generalizability. Developing and testing an industry-specific e-service quality scale tailored to the unique aspects of affiliate marketing, potentially integrating dimensions from the E-S-QUAL. Conducting longitudinal studies to track how partner satisfaction and its drivers evolve. Investigating the impact of specific digital tools and technologies (e.g., AI-powered chatbots,

augmented reality services) on customer satisfaction and loyalty within affiliate marketing (Li et al., 2025; Shams et al., 2024). Exploring the interplay between online and offline service quality involving affiliate marketing, seeking to understand how they collectively contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lee & Han, 2022).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study found a significant association between service quality and the satisfaction of Omega Media Worldwide JSC's affiliate partners. By confirming that all five SERVQUAL dimensions positively impacted satisfaction, with Assurance and Empathy the most impactful, this research provided crucial insights. The findings indicated that affiliate marketing companies must prioritize efficient, trustworthy service delivery and cultivate genuine empathy in their partner relationships to build lasting loyalty and ensure a sustainable competitive advantage in the dynamic digital economy.

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### **Author contributions**

All authors were involved in the conception and design, and Anh was involved in conceptualization, formal analysis, and research. Linh and Vy were involved in the data collection process and contributed to the first draft of the manuscript. Loi analyzed and interpreted the data, drafted the paper, and Anh made a critical revision. Loi is critically revising it for intellectual content, approving the version for publication, and ensuring that all authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

### **Statements and declarations**

#### **Declaration of conflicting interest**

The authors of this study declared no conflicts of interest in the research, authorship, and publication of this manuscript.

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#### **Data availability**

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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