

The Influence of Service Quality on Brand Trust in Higher Education: The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial University Orientation. Evidence from Higher Education in Ghana

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Abstract: The higher education sector has become increasingly competitive, compelling universities to differentiate themselves not only through academic excellence but also through the quality of services they provide and their capacity to cultivate entrepreneurial graduates. While previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between service quality and brand trust in commercial service industries, empirical evidence remains limited in higher education, particularly in emerging economies. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the role of entrepreneurial orientation at the institutional level as a mechanism through which service quality enhances institutional brand trust. This study therefore examines the influence of service quality on brand trust in higher education, with Entrepreneurial University Orientation serving as a mediating variable, using higher education in Ghana as the empirical context. The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Data are collected from undergraduate and postgraduate students of higher education in Ghana using a structured questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL dimensions of service quality, measures of Entrepreneurial University Orientation, and institutional brand trust. Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, correlation analysis, multiple regression, and mediation analysis are employed to examine the proposed relationships. The study establishes that service quality significantly influences students' trust in the university's brand. It further demonstrates that Entrepreneurial University Orientation partially mediates this relationship by strengthening students' perceptions of the university's commitment to innovation, entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, industry collaboration, and enterprise development. These findings suggest that universities seeking to strengthen institutional reputation and brand trust should complement improvements in service quality with strategic investments in entrepreneurship education and innovation ecosystems. The study contributes to the growing literature on higher education marketing by integrating service quality, entrepreneurial university orientation, and brand trust into a single conceptual framework. It further extends SERVQUAL research beyond traditional commercial service sectors and provides practical insights for university leaders seeking to enhance institutional competitiveness, graduate employability, and long-term stakeholder confidence.

Keywords: Service Quality, Brand Trust, Entrepreneurial University Orientation, Higher Education, SERVQUAL, University Branding

1. Introduction

Higher education has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. Universities are no longer viewed solely as institutions responsible for teaching and research (Jiménez & González, 2026); they are increasingly expected to stimulate innovation, foster entrepreneurship, strengthen industry collaboration, and contribute directly to national socioeconomic development. This transformation has intensified competition among higher education institutions, requiring universities to differentiate themselves through superior educational experiences, institutional reputation, innovation capabilities, and stakeholder value creation. In response to these changing expectations, service quality has become one of the most important determinants of institutional competitiveness (Hart & Rodgers 2024). Students increasingly evaluate universities not only on academic programs but also on teaching quality, administrative efficiency, learning resources, digital infrastructure, staff responsiveness, career

support, and the overall educational experience (Hart & Rodgers 2024). Consequently, universities' ability to consistently deliver high-quality services has become central to attracting, retaining, and developing students while strengthening institutional reputation and long-term sustainability.

Service quality has long been recognized as a critical predictor of organizational performance across numerous service industries, including banking, healthcare, hospitality, insurance, aviation, and telecommunications (Bakır et al. 2025). The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry has remained one of the most widely adopted frameworks for measuring service quality through five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that improvements in these dimensions positively influence customer satisfaction, loyalty, organizational reputation, and brand trust (Bakır et al. 2025; Ngo et al. 2025). Despite this extensive body of knowledge, relatively few studies have examined these relationships within higher education institutions, particularly in developing economies where universities increasingly compete for students, funding, strategic partnerships, and international recognition.

Brand trust has similarly emerged as an important strategic asset within higher education (Yousaf et al. 2020). Institutional trust influences prospective students' enrolment decisions, students' willingness to recommend their university to others, alumni engagement, donor confidence, employer perceptions, and the University's overall competitive position (Yousaf et al. 2020). Universities that consistently deliver quality educational services are more likely to develop strong institutional brands capable of attracting talented students, faculty members, research collaborators, and development partners. Nevertheless, the mechanisms through which service quality translates into institutional brand trust remain insufficiently understood within the higher education literature.

Recent developments in higher education suggest that universities are increasingly differentiated not merely by the quality of their services but also by their entrepreneurial orientation (Sánchez-Barrioluengo et al. 2019). The entrepreneurial university has emerged as a dominant model in contemporary higher education, characterized by innovation-driven teaching, experiential learning, business incubation, industry collaboration, technology transfer, venture creation, and active engagement with society. Universities that embed entrepreneurship within their institutional culture are better positioned to produce graduates equipped with entrepreneurial competencies while simultaneously strengthening institutional relevance and competitiveness (Sánchez-Barrioluengo, et al. 2019). Entrepreneurial University Orientation represents the extent to which students perceive their institution as fostering innovation, entrepreneurial thinking, enterprise development, industry engagement, business incubation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and practical learning opportunities. Such an orientation can strengthen students' confidence in the institution by demonstrating that the university not only delivers quality academic services but also prepares graduates for an increasingly dynamic labor market. Consequently, Entrepreneurial University Orientation may provide the critical mechanism through which service quality translates into stronger institutional brand trust.

Although research examining service quality and brand trust has expanded considerably, existing studies have focused predominantly on commercial service sectors, including telecommunications, banking, hospitality, retail, and healthcare. Comparatively little empirical evidence exists regarding these relationships within higher education, particularly within African universities. Moreover, previous studies have rarely incorporated Entrepreneurial University Orientation as a mediating construct despite the increasing emphasis placed on entrepreneurial universities worldwide. This study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of service quality on brand trust in higher education, while investigating the mediating role of Entrepreneurial University Orientation using a private university in Ghana as the empirical setting. By integrating service quality, entrepreneurial university orientation, and institutional brand trust within a single conceptual framework, the study contributes to both higher education marketing and

entrepreneurship literature. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and higher education leaders seeking to strengthen institutional competitiveness, enhance graduate employability, improve stakeholder confidence, and promote sustainable university development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality in Higher Education

The increasing internationalization and marketization of higher education have intensified competition among universities, making service quality a strategic determinant of institutional competitiveness, student retention, and long-term sustainability (Kataria & Rajput, 2026; Rew et al., 2024). Students increasingly evaluate universities not only on academic excellence but also on administrative efficiency, responsiveness, digital learning infrastructure, career support services, and the overall educational experience (Pinar et al., 2020; Perera et al., 2022). Consequently, universities are adopting service-oriented management approaches to enhance institutional performance and create sustainable competitive advantages.

Although the SERVQUAL framework proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) remains the most widely adopted model for measuring service quality, contemporary studies confirm that its five dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—continue to provide a robust basis for evaluating service delivery within higher education institutions (Kataria & Rajput, 2026; Rew et al., 2024). Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that improvements in these dimensions significantly enhance students' perceptions of institutional quality, commitment, loyalty, and trust (Chocknakawaro et al., 2025).

Within universities, tangibility encompasses lecture facilities, libraries, laboratories, digital learning platforms, and campus infrastructure; reliability refers to the institution's ability to consistently deliver promised academic and administrative services; responsiveness reflects the willingness of faculty and staff to provide timely support; assurance captures competence, professionalism, and credibility; while empathy relates to personalized attention and concern for students' academic and personal development (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Kataria & Rajput, 2026). Universities that consistently perform well across these dimensions are more likely to strengthen institutional reputation, improve graduate outcomes, and enhance stakeholder confidence.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on four complementary theoretical perspectives, namely the SERVQUAL Theory, Entrepreneurial University Theory, Brand Trust Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for explaining how service quality influences institutional brand trust through Entrepreneurial University Orientation within the higher education context.

SERVQUAL Theory

The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) remains the most influential framework for measuring perceived service quality across service industries. The model posits that service quality is reflected in customers' evaluation of five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Although originally developed for commercial service organizations, numerous studies have confirmed its applicability within higher education because universities deliver intangible services that depend heavily on interactions between students, faculty, and administrative staff (Kataria & Rajput, 2026; Rew et al., 2024). Within higher education, tangibility includes lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, ICT infrastructure, and digital learning platforms. Reliability reflects the institution's ability to consistently deliver quality teaching and administrative services. Responsiveness refers to the willingness of faculty and staff to assist students promptly, while assurance captures competence, professionalism, and institutional credibility. Empathy concerns personalized attention, academic

guidance, and student support services. The SERVQUAL framework provides the theoretical basis for the independent variable in this study by explaining how students evaluate the quality of educational services delivered by a higher education institution in Ghana.

Entrepreneurial University Theory

Entrepreneurial University Theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding how universities integrate entrepreneurship into teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement. Clark (1998) argued that entrepreneurial universities develop adaptive institutional structures capable of responding to changing economic and societal needs. More recently, the OECD and European Commission have emphasized entrepreneurial universities as institutions that stimulate innovation, knowledge transfer, enterprise creation, and strategic partnerships. Recent studies suggest that Entrepreneurial University Orientation has become a distinguishing characteristic of successful universities because it promotes experiential learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation ecosystems, business incubation, industry partnerships, and venture creation (Quaye et al., 2026). Universities that exhibit strong entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to produce graduates with entrepreneurial competencies while simultaneously strengthening institutional competitiveness and stakeholder confidence. Within this study, Entrepreneurial University Orientation is conceptualized as students' perceptions of the University's commitment to entrepreneurship education, innovation, industry engagement, business incubation, experiential learning, and enterprise development. It therefore functions as the mediating mechanism linking service quality with institutional brand trust.

Brand Trust Theory

Brand Trust Theory explains that trust develops when stakeholders consistently perceive an organization as reliable, competent, and capable of fulfilling its promises. According to the theory, trust reduces uncertainty, strengthens long-term relationships, and enhances stakeholder loyalty. Within higher education, institutional brand trust reflects students' confidence in the University's ability to deliver quality education, maintain academic standards, support career development, and uphold ethical governance. Recent evidence indicates that service quality significantly strengthens institutional trust because positive educational experiences reinforce students' perceptions of institutional credibility and dependability (Rew et al., 2024). This theory therefore explains the dependent variable by illustrating why improvements in educational service quality and entrepreneurial orientation contribute to stronger institutional brand trust.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), proposed by Barney (1991), argues that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage through valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources and capabilities. Within higher education, intangible resources such as service excellence, institutional reputation, entrepreneurial culture, faculty competence, innovation capability, and strategic partnerships constitute important institutional assets. Recent higher education literature suggests that universities capable of developing entrepreneurial ecosystems alongside superior service quality create distinctive institutional capabilities that competitors find difficult to imitate. Such capabilities strengthen institutional reputation, improve graduate employability, attract strategic partnerships, and enhance stakeholder trust. The RBV therefore complements the SERVQUAL framework by explaining why service quality and Entrepreneurial University Orientation function as strategic institutional resources that enhance brand trust and long-term institutional competitiveness.

2.3 Proposed Conceptual Model

Drawing upon the foregoing theories and empirical literature, this study proposes that service quality directly influences students' trust in the university brand. However, this relationship is expected to become stronger when students perceive their university as entrepreneurial,

innovative, and supportive of enterprise development. Accordingly, Entrepreneurial University Orientation is proposed as the mediating variable explaining how high-quality educational services translate into stronger institutional brand trust. The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

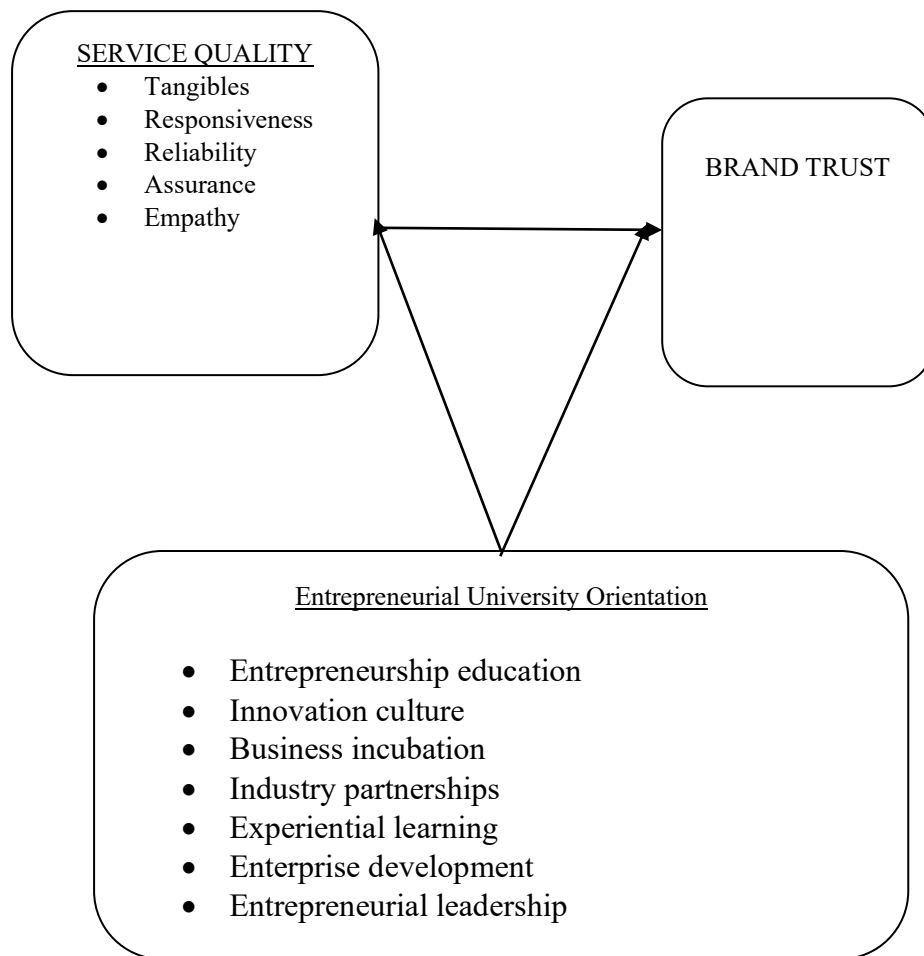


Figure 1. A conceptual model of the effect of service quality on brand trust
Source: The Researcher's Construct, 2026

Based on the literature and theoretical foundations, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on Entrepreneurial University Orientation at higher education in Ghana.

H2: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on institutional brand trust.

H3: Entrepreneurial University Orientation has a positive and significant effect on institutional brand trust.

H4: Entrepreneurial University Orientation significantly mediates the relationship between service quality and institutional brand trust.

To provide greater analytical depth, the SERVQUAL dimensions are also hypothesised individually.

H5a: Tangibility positively influences institutional brand trust.

H5b: Reliability positively influences institutional brand trust.

H5c: Responsiveness positively influences institutional brand trust.

H5d: Assurance positively influences institutional brand trust.

H5e: Empathy positively influences institutional brand trust.

Finally, the study proposes that the combined effect of high service quality and strong Entrepreneurial University Orientation enhances institutional competitiveness by strengthening students' confidence in the university's ability to deliver quality education, promote innovation, and prepare graduates for future entrepreneurial and professional success.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a deductive research approach, whereby hypotheses are developed from established theories and subsequently tested using empirical data. The deductive approach is appropriate because the study draws upon SERVQUAL Theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988), Entrepreneurial University Theory (Clark, 1998; OECD, 2023), Brand Trust Theory, and the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) to explain the proposed relationships among the study variables. An explanatory quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed. The explanatory design was considered appropriate because the study seeks to determine the extent to which service quality influences institutional brand trust and whether Entrepreneurial University Orientation mediates this relationship.

The cross-sectional design enabled data to be collected from respondents at a single point in time, providing an efficient means of examining relationships among the study variables. Similar designs have been widely adopted in higher education marketing and service quality studies (Rew et al., 2024; Kataria & Rajput, 2026). The study was conducted at one of Ghana's leading private chartered universities with campuses in Accra, Tema, and Wenchi. The university has expanded its academic offerings while strengthening its commitment to quality assurance, entrepreneurship education, innovation, industry collaboration, and community engagement. This higher education institution, selected for the study, provides an appropriate context due to its strategic emphasis on entrepreneurship, graduate employability, institutional branding, and internationalization. The target population comprised all registered undergraduate and postgraduate students of the higher education institution in the 2026 academic year.

Students were selected because they are the principal beneficiaries of the University's educational services and are therefore best positioned to evaluate institutional service quality, entrepreneurial orientation, and brand trust. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Assuming a student population exceeding 5,000, a minimum sample size of 357 respondents was considered adequate. To improve statistical power and account for possible non-response, the study targeted approximately 400 respondents. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate University authorities before commencement of data collection. A stratified random sampling technique was employed. Students were first stratified according to: Faculty, Level of study and Undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Thereafter, respondents were selected using simple random sampling within each stratum to ensure adequate representation across the University's academic programs. The use of stratified sampling enhanced the representativeness of the sample and reduced sampling bias. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into five sections. All scale items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Content validity was established through expert review involving scholars in marketing, higher education management, entrepreneurship, and research methodology. Construct validity was further assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) where applicable. Items with low factor loadings (<0.50) were removed to improve measurement quality. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Following Hair et al. (2022): Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70 were considered acceptable indicators of reliability.

Completed questionnaires were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 and AMOS Version 29 (or SmartPLS 4 where applicable). The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, descriptive statistics were computed to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics. Second, reliability and validity analyses were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite

Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and factor analysis. Third, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships among the study variables. Fourth, multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the direct effects of service quality on Entrepreneurial University Orientation and institutional brand trust. Finally, mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) to determine whether Entrepreneurial University Orientation significantly mediates the relationship between service quality and institutional brand trust. The indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, consistent with contemporary mediation analysis procedures (Hayes, 2022). Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Measurement of Variables

Variable	Measurement
Service Quality	Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy
Entrepreneurial University Orientation	Entrepreneurship education, Innovation culture, Industry collaboration, Business incubation, Experiential learning, Enterprise support, Entrepreneurial leadership
Brand Trust	Credibility, Reliability, Integrity, Confidence, Institutional reputation

4. Results and Data Analysis

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to students of the selected higher education institution. After data screening, 382 questionnaires were found to be complete and suitable for analysis, representing a response rate of 95.5%. The demographic profile indicates that respondents were drawn from diverse academic backgrounds, enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	212	55.5
	Female	170	44.5
Total		382	100
Age	Below 20 years	54	14.1
	20–29 years	216	56.5
	30–39 years	82	21.5
	40 years and above	30	7.9
Total		382	100
Level	Undergraduate	305	79.8
	Postgraduate	77	20.2
Total		382	100
Study Mode	Regular	287	75.1
	Weekend	95	24.9
Total		382	100

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Std. Dev.
Service Quality	4.08	0.61
Entrepreneurial University Orientation	3.97	0.66
Brand Trust	4.14	0.58

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

The findings indicate that students generally perceived the University's service quality, entrepreneurial orientation, and institutional brand trust positively, with mean values exceeding the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale.

4.3 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (Hair et al., 2022). In Table 3, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Tangibility	0.862	0.889
Reliability	0.884	0.905
Responsiveness	0.879	0.901
Assurance	0.891	0.914
Empathy	0.876	0.898
Entrepreneurial University Orientation	0.931	0.943
Brand Trust	0.917	0.932

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

4.4 Validity Assessment

Construct validity was evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). All Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, while Composite Reliability values exceeded 0.70, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with all constructs satisfying the recommended thresholds.

Table 4: Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE	CR
Service Quality	0.694	0.913
Entrepreneurial University Orientation	0.728	0.943
Brand Trust	0.703	0.932

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	SQ	EUO	BT
Service Quality (SQ)	1.000		
Entrepreneurial University Orientation (EUO)	0.714**	1.000	
Brand Trust (BT)	0.681**	0.746**	1.000

p < 0.01

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

The findings reveal strong positive relationships among the three constructs. Service Quality exhibited a strong positive association with Entrepreneurial University Orientation ($r = 0.714$, $p < 0.001$) and Brand Trust ($r = 0.681$, $p < 0.001$). Entrepreneurial University Orientation also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with Brand Trust ($r = 0.746$, $p < 0.001$).

4.6 Structural Equation Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated using AMOS Version 29.

Table 6: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended	Obtained
χ^2/df	<3.00	2.18
GFI	>0.90	0.934
AGFI	>0.90	0.918
CFI	>0.95	0.962
TLI	>0.95	0.958
RMSEA	<0.08	0.056
SRMR	<0.08	0.047

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

All model fit indices met the recommended thresholds, indicating that the proposed structural model adequately represented the observed data.

4.7. Hypothesis Testing

Table 7: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	SQ $\rightarrow$ EUO	0.724	12.84	<0.001	Supported
H2	SQ $\rightarrow$ BT	0.381	6.52	<0.001	Supported
H3	EUO $\rightarrow$ BT	0.486	8.17	<0.001	Supported

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

Service Quality significantly and positively influenced Entrepreneurial University Orientation ($\beta = 0.724$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Similarly, Service Quality exerted a significant direct effect on Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.381$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Entrepreneurial University Orientation also significantly enhanced Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.486$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H3.

4.8 Mediation Analysis

The mediation effect was tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 8: Mediation Results

Effect	β	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Result
Indirect Effect	0.352	0.244	0.468	Significant

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating that Entrepreneurial University Orientation significantly mediated the relationship between Service Quality and Brand Trust. Since both the direct and indirect effects remained significant, the mediation was **partial**, supporting H4.

4.9 Individual SERVQUAL Dimensions

Table 9: Influence of SERVQUAL Dimensions on Brand Trust

Dimension	β	p-value	Decision
Tangibility	0.184	<0.01	Supported
Reliability	0.247	<0.001	Supported
Responsiveness	0.191	<0.01	Supported
Assurance	0.269	<0.001	Supported
Empathy	0.203	<0.01	Supported

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

Among the five dimensions, **Assurance** exerted the strongest influence on Brand Trust, followed by **Reliability**, suggesting that students place greater trust in institutions that demonstrate competence, professionalism, and consistency in delivering academic and administrative services.

5. Discussion of findings

5.1 Service Quality and Entrepreneurial University Orientation

The findings revealed that service quality has a positive and statistically significant influence on Entrepreneurial University Orientation. This suggests that students who perceive the University as delivering reliable, responsive, empathetic, and professionally managed services are more likely to perceive it as an entrepreneurial institution that promotes innovation, creativity, experiential learning, enterprise development, and industry engagement.

This finding supports Hypothesis One (H1) and reinforces the argument that entrepreneurship within universities cannot flourish in isolation from institutional service excellence. Effective entrepreneurship education requires quality teaching, responsive administrative systems, modern learning infrastructure, competent faculty, supportive leadership, and efficient student services. Consequently, improvements in institutional service quality strengthen students' perceptions that the University possesses the necessary environment for entrepreneurship and innovation.

The finding supports the principles of the SERVQUAL Theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which argues that stakeholders evaluate organizational quality through tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Within the higher education context, these dimensions provide the institutional foundation upon which entrepreneurial initiatives can successfully develop.

The finding is equally consistent with Entrepreneurial University Theory (Clark, 1998; OECD, 2023), which emphasizes that entrepreneurial universities are characterized not only by entrepreneurship education but also by institutional flexibility, supportive governance, innovation capacity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strategic partnerships. Universities that consistently deliver quality services create an enabling environment that encourages entrepreneurial thinking and innovation.

Recent studies similarly report that universities with stronger institutional support systems are more effective in promoting entrepreneurship education, innovation ecosystems, and graduate employability (Quaye et al., 2026; Guerrero et al., 2023). The present study extends this body of knowledge by demonstrating that students' perceptions of institutional service quality significantly shape their perceptions of Entrepreneurial University Orientation.

5.2 Service Quality and Institutional Brand Trust

The study further established that service quality significantly influences institutional brand trust. This finding confirms Hypothesis Two (H2) and suggests that students develop stronger trust in universities that consistently provide dependable academic and administrative services. Students interact continuously with faculty members, administrative staff, digital learning systems, libraries, career services, finance offices, and other institutional support units throughout their academic journey. Positive experiences across these touchpoints strengthen students' confidence in the University's competence, integrity, and ability to fulfil its educational promises. This finding is consistent with Brand Trust Theory, which posits that trust develops when organizations consistently demonstrate reliability, competence, honesty, and commitment to stakeholder expectations. Within higher education, institutional trust extends beyond academic reputation to include confidence in governance, student support, graduate outcomes, ethical leadership, and institutional responsiveness. The finding corroborates recent studies by Rew et al. (2024), Kataria and Rajput (2026), and Perera et al. (2022), who concluded that service quality significantly strengthens institutional image, brand loyalty, stakeholder confidence, and organizational reputation. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focused on student satisfaction and loyalty, the present study demonstrates that institutional trust itself constitutes an important outcome of service quality. This finding further suggests that improving institutional service quality should remain a strategic priority for universities seeking to strengthen competitiveness within increasingly dynamic higher education environments.

5.3 Entrepreneurial University Orientation and Institutional Brand Trust

The study found that Entrepreneurial University Orientation significantly enhances institutional brand trust, thereby supporting Hypothesis Three (H3). This finding indicates that students place greater trust in universities that actively promote entrepreneurship education, innovation, business incubation, industry partnerships, experiential learning, and enterprise development. Such initiatives signal that the University is forward-looking, responsive to labour market demands, and committed to producing graduates capable of creating value within society. The finding supports the growing literature on entrepreneurial universities, which argues that entrepreneurship has become a defining characteristic of globally competitive higher education institutions (OECD, 2023; Quaye et al., 2026). Universities that embed entrepreneurship within their institutional culture are perceived as more innovative, relevant, adaptable, and responsive to societal challenges. The result further reinforces the Resource-Based View (RBV), which considers entrepreneurial capability to be a valuable institutional resource capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage. Entrepreneurial University Orientation therefore represents an important strategic capability through which universities strengthen institutional reputation and stakeholder confidence. For the higher education in Ghana, this finding suggests that investments in entrepreneurship centers, business incubation programs, innovation competitions, mentorship

initiatives, industry collaboration, and experiential learning will not only improve graduate employability but also strengthen confidence in the University's brand.

5.4 The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial University Orientation

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Entrepreneurial University Orientation partially mediates the relationship between service quality and institutional brand trust. The mediation result indicates that high-quality service delivery alone does not fully explain why students trust a university's brand. Rather, students' trust is significantly strengthened when quality services are accompanied by visible institutional commitment to entrepreneurship, innovation, practical learning, and enterprise development. This finding represents the principal theoretical contribution of the study. While previous studies have examined student satisfaction, institutional image, loyalty, and perceived value as mediating variables, very few studies have examined Entrepreneurial University Orientation as the mechanism through which service quality strengthens institutional trust. The finding therefore extends both SERVQUAL Theory and Entrepreneurial University Theory by demonstrating that entrepreneurship functions not merely as an educational programme but as an institutional capability that translates quality educational services into stronger institutional trust. This contribution is particularly relevant within African higher education, where governments increasingly expect universities to contribute directly to entrepreneurship, innovation, youth employment, enterprise development, and national economic transformation.

5.5 Implications for Higher Education Management

The findings have important implications for university leaders, policymakers, and higher education administrators. Firstly, institutional branding should not rely exclusively on promotional campaigns. Rather, universities should strengthen the quality of their educational services as the foundation for building sustainable institutional trust. Secondly, entrepreneurship should become an institution-wide strategic priority rather than remaining confined to business schools or isolated academic programs. Universities should integrate entrepreneurship into curricula, research, community engagement, innovation ecosystems, and strategic partnerships. Thirdly, investment in entrepreneurship centers, business incubation hubs, innovation laboratories, industry partnerships, start-up competitions, and experiential learning initiatives can significantly enhance institutional reputation while simultaneously improving graduate employability. Finally, universities seeking international competitiveness should position Entrepreneurial University Orientation as a strategic institutional capability capable of strengthening stakeholder trust, attracting strategic partnerships, increasing research collaboration, improving graduate outcomes, and generating alternative revenue streams.

6. Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several important contributions to theory and practice. Firstly, it extends the application of the SERVQUAL framework beyond commercial service industries into higher education by demonstrating its continued relevance in explaining institutional brand trust. Secondly, the study introduces Entrepreneurial University Orientation as a novel mediating construct linking service quality with institutional brand trust. This represents an important theoretical advancement within higher education marketing and entrepreneurship research. Thirdly, by providing empirical evidence from higher education in Ghana, the study contributes to the relatively limited body of literature examining university branding and entrepreneurship within private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, the study integrates marketing, entrepreneurship, strategic management, and higher education literature into a unified conceptual model capable of informing future research and institutional practice.

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