

CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS AND MAILBAG MARKETING: INSIGHTS FROM KARACHI'S FAST-FOOD INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of online customer reviews on purchase intentions among fast-food restaurant consumers in Karachi. Existing literature highlights a gap in research addressing the role of online reviews in shaping customer behavior in Asian developing markets, particularly through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior. To address this, the study employs theoretical triangulation to ensure model validity and contextual relevance. Data were collected via convenience sampling from 275 customers of local fast-food restaurants. Statistical analysis using SMART-PLS 3.0 indicates that online customer reviews significantly impact customers' purchase intentions. However, intense competition within the fast-food sector may mitigate this effect, reducing customer preference for specific outlets. These findings underscore the strategic importance of managing online reviews and competitive positioning in enhancing consumer purchase behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Advancement in technology leverages individuals or groups to share their opinions, thoughts, and feelings across the globe. Hence, it is mandatory to highlight different vehicles that consumers may use to make the world notice them and their feelings (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). However, buyers who are purchasing online do not have the liberty to evaluate the product directly. Hence, the significance of online reviews has increased significantly. According to research, most online buyers wait and observe peers before deciding on a purchase (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). Research also highlighted different vehicles that customers may use to post their reviews, i.e., Mailbags (reviews on seller websites), Reviews through emails, Posted Reviews (Reviews on other websites) and discussion forums, etc (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Through these vehicles customers become able to write and express their opinion about different products and services. These opinions will be used by the other customer to

have an idea about the brand, etc that ultimately affects purchase intention (Suryawan et al., 2022).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Research highlighted that customer reviews play a very important role in influencing management practices such as brand image and customer market capture (Sahoo et al., 2018). With the help of the internet, consumers can obtain information regarding products and services easily, and often, these results will be filtered by recommendations from users as well as professional reviews from critics (Re & Solow-Niederman, 2019). For example, it is a well-established fact that many platforms use customer reviews to create a positive picture of their offerings (Sadowski et al., 2018). However, some of the previous studies, e.g., Park et al. (2007), also indicated that online retailers can approve customer reviews, after which only favorable comments are available to the viewers. However,

some of the studies, e.g., Wielki (2020), highlighted the association between online reviews and sales of the product but these results are very limited and cannot be generalized (Pei et al., 2020).

Hence, in the light of these research gaps there is a significant gap to the impact of positive reviews from customers on purchase intention. Similar has been highlighted by the latest studies that the impact of customer reviews on the purchase intention is underexplored (Camilleri et al., 2023). Other studies, e.g., Qiu and Zhang (2024), highlighted similar points that the impact of positive customer reviews may vary across industries, geographical and cultural boundaries. Similar points are also highlighted by studies conducted in Indonesia that findings from fast-food restaurants of one country cannot be generalized or deployed to other findings (Burkov et al., 2023 & Tanudjaja et al., 2022). These points are sufficient to highlight and validate the points mentioned by Park et al. (2007) and Qiu and Zhang (2024) to foster a high need for research to explore the impact in the context of Pakistan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study has been based upon theoretical triangulation to develop better impact over readers and future research work. Hence, the base of this study has been grounded in The Dissonance Theory, Social Proof Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

Xu et al. (2022) propose a cognitive-dissonance theory that embarks on the dissonance felt by customers after using the product. This theory is grounded in the point that customers who were expecting higher or superior value, but the product does not match the need. Hence, the customer will experience discomfort, which is termed cognitive dissonance. According to Li et al. (2020) rating given by a customer after experiencing the product or service is the most important form of product evaluation.

Social Proof theory is the other theory which claims that people tend to copy the actions and behavior of other people to comply with social requirements. Hence, this theory may also be related to the customer purchase from the same store or brand that is found to be approved by the social group (Bustinza et al., 2019).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the third theory used in this study to formulate the model and the theory is presented by Ajzen (1991). The theory postulated that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are the factors that are used to influence customer's intention to purchase. Adding to the impact, Wielki (2020) added that customer reviews also possess the tendency to influence the customer's attitude, which may ultimately cause the customer's intention to purchase.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is one of the prime studies that has been conducted through theoretical triangulation and focuses upon customer's Attitude and Intention to purchase to assess the positive impact of online customer feedback. The actual purpose of this study is to assess the reality of online positive reviews by customers and their translation on intention to purchase.

Therefore, regardless of the simple research model, the significance of this study has multiple folds and it will serve the interest of multiple stakeholders. Hence, it is also required to clarify that this study is not only beneficial for academia but will also assist further research and also assist businessmen in understanding the extent of benefits they may earn through positive online customer reviews.

RESEARCH MODEL

This study uses The Dissonance Theory, The Social Proof Theory, and The Theory of Planned Behavior. The research Model has been formulated in which the main predicting variable is Online Customer Reviews, Customer Attitude is serving as the mediating variable, and Intention to purchase is the outcome variable. The association used for the quantitative assessment has also been reflected through the study of Tran (2020) that online reviews influence consumption-related behaviors that ultimately cause customer intention to purchase. However, competition always has an impact over customer intention to purchase (Chang & Yu, 2023). Intensive competition also has a significant impact on customers' intention to purchase in the fast-food industry (Tat et al., 2011), and according to Xu et al (2024), attention towards online customer reviews of competing brands may diminish customers' intention to purchase from the focal



restaurant. Hence, in the light of these parameters, the research model for this study is as under:

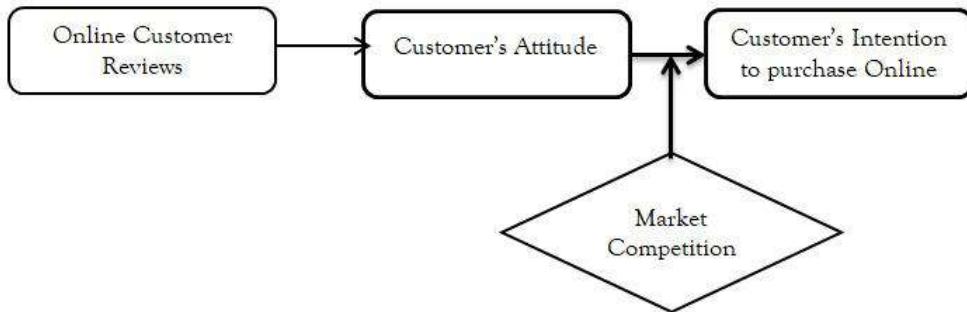


Figure 1: Research Model

MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are Online Customer Reviews?

RQ2: How do Online Customer Reviews Affect Related Behavior?

RQ3: How Theory of Planned Behavior is associated with the use of Online Customer Reviews?

RQ4: What is the impact of competition in the market on validity of online customer's reviews?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Customer Reviews and Customer Attitude:

In today's digital economy, customer reviews are crucial, as they have a substantial impact on both product sales and company reputation. Reviews are an essential source of information and validation in a time when consumers mostly rely on the internet to study products and make purchases (Wielki, 2020). Their influence is felt in several different facets of the customer journey, influencing decisions, forming opinions, and eventually increasing revenue. Positive product reviews can set a product apart from the competition and give it a competitive advantage. Customers tend to choose products with strong ratings and reviews, as positive feedback reduces perceived risk and increases purchase confidence. Satisfied customers often share their experiences online or through word-of-mouth, leading to higher conversion rates (Yang et al., 2019). Studies on fast-food restaurants similarly show that online reviews reflect customer perceptions of food quality, ambiance, pricing, and service (Gan et al., 2017; Yalçinkaya & Just, 2023). Local fast-food restaurants, in particular, provide clearer

insights into the impact of online reviews, as their feedback is generally less polarized than that of major chains (Yalçinkaya & Just, 2023).

According to research, with the advent of technology, it's become quite easy to assess customer sentiments with the help of sophisticated tools like Natural Language Processing (NLP), etc (Niu & Xing, 2024 & Pareek et al., 2023).

H_{1A}: There is a significant association between online customer reviews and Customer Attitude towards local fast food restaurants from Karachi

Online Customer Reviews and Customer's Intention to Purchase:

Studies define customer's purchase intention as the subjective assessment of a product that has been given by customers after the generic evaluation of the product. The purpose of this type of evaluation is to highlight the customer's willingness to purchase the product. According to studies, multiple outcomes can be related to willingness to purchase, e.g., High Probability to consider the product for purchase, Future inclination toward the product, and Purchase Decision (Blaakrishnan et al., 2014). However, according to some of the studies online, reviews that are supplemented with textual comments, ratings, or imagery would be very beneficial for creating a positive impact on a customer's intention to purchase. Hence, online customer reviews are termed as highly influential tactics that may positively affect customer intention to purchase (Tran, 2020). According to Mujahid et al (2023) a significant number of customers are using online reviews as the base to evaluate the



restaurant and its quality. Hence, it is optimal to believe that online reviews are one of the legitimate sources behind the customer's willingness to visit the restaurant. However, there are studies that mention about the lacking of effective parameters that may resulted in formulation of adequate parameters for measurement of online reviews. Thus, little understanding available about the way through which online customer review may affect customer's intention to purchase (Tran, 2020).

H₂A: There is a direct and significant association between Customer's Attitude and Intention to purchase from local fast food restaurants from Karachi

Customer's Attitude and Customer's Intention to Purchase:

There is a direct impact of customer's attitude and customer intention to purchase (Ramadhan et al., 2024). However, the magnitude of customer's attitude on intention to purchase may vary across culture and geographical boundaries. Similar can be evident through the impact of brand image with respect to the studies conducted with reference to India and Malaysia etc (Lahap et al., 2024 & Shanbhogue & Ranjith, 2024). Similar has also been indicated by one of the latest study that has been conducted with reference to the online customer reviews from Saudi Arabia (Alghamdi et al., 2024). Studies e.g., Batool et al (2023) and Zahid et al (2022) also highlighted that the association is also found true for the consumer from Pakistan. According to these studies attitude shaped-up either by hedonic or utilitarian purposes resulted in the increase of impact produced by customer's attitude and intention to purchase. A similar has been valid for fast food restaurants, as positive customer perception is found to be reflected adequately towards customer willingness to intention to purchase (Ribeiro et al., 2023)

Online Customer Reviews, Customer Attitude and Customer's Intention to Purchase:

Positive Reviews resulted in increase of customer trust and intention to purchase. Research also mentioned online customer reviews as the major sources of customer belief regarding the product quality (Udayana & Indarya, 2024). Latest studies

e.g., Laksana et al (2025) and Rosyada and Saktiana (2024) indicated about the mediating role of customer's attitude between online customer reviews and intention to purchase. However, some of the studies also mentioned about the difference in the direct and indirect association of customer's attitude towards purchase intention. According to literature under difference cultural settings promotions and brand image are treated as variables that may diminish or extend the direct and indirect associations (Graciafernandy & Almayani, 2023). Something similar is found true for the fast food industry, where customer attitude is found to be an effective mediator between online reviews and customers' intention to purchase (Rosyada & Saktiana, 2024).

Therefore, it is optimal to believe in the point mentioned by Luo and LI (2013) that online customer reviews push the customer's trust, which ultimately causes an increase in intention to purchase.

H₃A: Customer's Attitude will mediate between Online Customer Reviews and Customer Intention to Purchase from local fast food restaurants from Karachi

Market Competition and Customer Intention to Purchase in the Fast-Food Industry:

According to research, competition always has an impact on the intention to purchase from a focal firm (Chang & Yu, 2023). A similar is also valid for the fast-food industry, where intensive competition resulted in a decrease of customers' intention to purchase from focused restaurants (Tat et al., 2011). Latest study, Wulandari and Istikomah (2024) assessed the impact of online customer referrals and highlighted that online customer referral for competing brands tends to reduce customer willingness to purchase towards the focused brand. This statement is extensively applicable in the fast-food sector, where customers prefer to use the internet and food ordering applications to purchase food.

H₄A: Market Competition moderates the relationship between customer's Attitude and Intention to Purchase in Fast-Food Industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is the research section that is purposely used to highlight the parameters used

in the compilation of the research with the reason to prefer these parameters over the others (Kothari, 2004). However, it is better to divide the research methodology into parts to clarify to readers the reason behind the selection of different parameters and also to create a better impact on the reader's understanding. There are two major divisions of Research Methodology, i.e., Research Design and Sampling Design (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016)

Research Design:

The purpose of this study is correlational, as indicated by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), and also follows the contextual gaps reflected by Camilleri et al. (2023) and Qiu and Zhang (2024). Hence, it is valid to check the authenticity and impact of positive e-WoM promotions by customers from Pakistan. Hence, through applying the concept of "**Research Onion**," the philosophy used in this study is epistemology, philosophical stance is post-positivism, research method is mono-method (quantitative), and research strategy is survey (Saunders et al., 2015).

Sampling Design:

The sampling design of this study is based on the study of Regina et al. (2021), which follows the theory proposed by Malhotra (2006) that the sample size must be four to five times higher than the number of items used in the questionnaire. Moreover, this study is based upon non-probability sampling that has also been used by Regina et al. (2021) and Suryawan et al. (2022), etc. However, for data collection, this study prefers Regina et al. (2021) to provide evidence through more respondents, as indicated by Malhotra (2006) and Suryawan et al. (2022). Therefore, this study includes all the customers who prefer to purchase online through websites or social media pages of local fast food restaurants. To compile the list, researchers have conducted a screening of social media pages and websites of local fast food restaurants operating in Karachi. After tight scrutiny and analysis, questionnaires were sent to the list of scrutinized customers via electronic medium. However, collecting responses from unknown respondents was quite difficult, which allowed us to compile this study with a modest sample of 275. However, the total number

of circulated questionnaires was 500, which yielded a response rate of 55%

Research Instrument:

Research Instrument for this study has been developed following the research work of previous studies i.e., Regina et al (2021) and Suryawan et al. (2022) etc that uses closed-ended questionnaires based upon five points Likert Scale.

Most indicators for variables such as Customer Reviews and Customer Intention to Purchase are adapted from Dwidienawati et al. (2020). Since their study does not address customer attitude, indicators for this construct are taken from Gilbert et al. (2004) and Ghoochani et al. (2019). Additionally, competition is introduced for the first time in studies on online customer reviews and purchase intention; therefore, elements of market competition are incorporated using measures from Ahmed et al. (2022), Dwidienawati et al. (2020), and Gilbert et al. (2004).

STATISTICAL TESTING & ANALYSIS

SMART-PLS is the sophisticated advanced statistical software developed by Ringle et al. (2005) to perform statistical analysis more effectively through applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is the second-generation multivariate data analysis tool used for the assessment of complex research models (Chidambaram et al., 2021). Gunzeler (2013) also highlighted the importance of SEM and mentioned that the tool is one of the finest tools to assess causal and temporal effects.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has been recognized as more effective than traditional regression, with its utility further enhanced by the adoption of SMART-PLS. As a widely preferred software for primary data analysis, SMART-PLS evaluates research models through two components: the outer (measurement) model, which examines relationships between constructs and their indicators, and the inner (structural) model, which assesses relationships among latent variables (Wong, 2013; Ab Hamid et al., 2017). Overall, SMART-PLS is considered a robust tool for identifying key paths and relationships within research frameworks (Vijaybanu & Arunkumar, 2018).

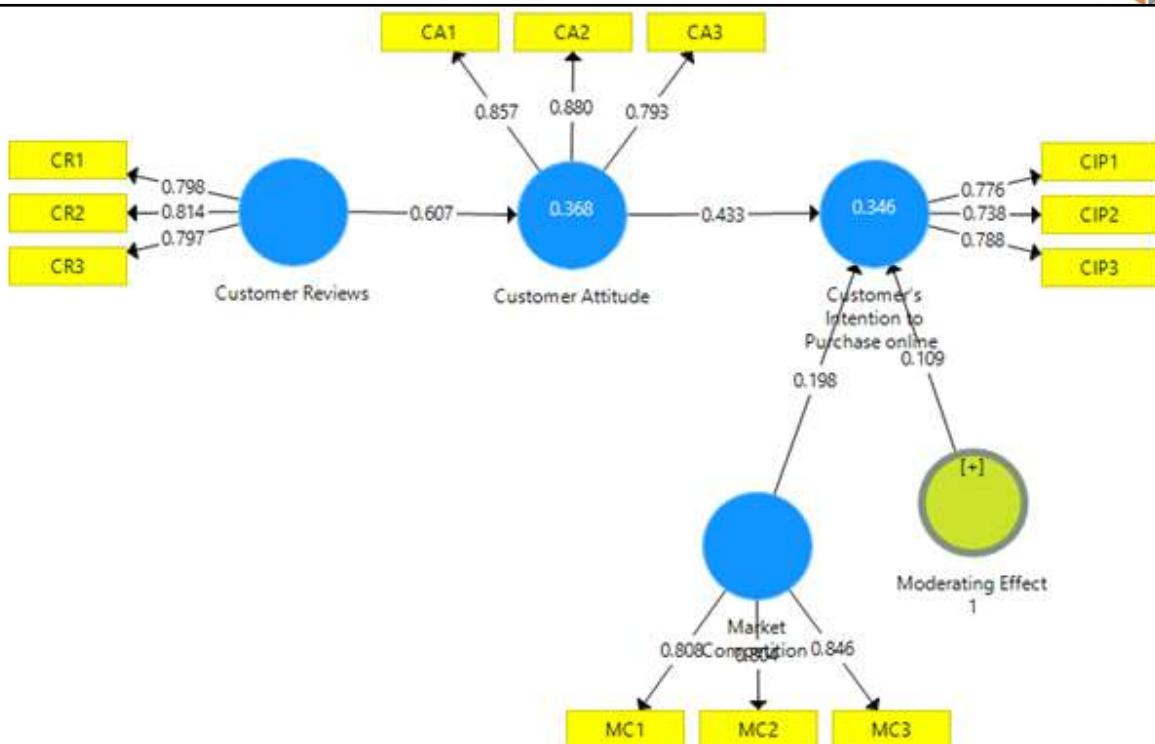


Figure 2: Outer Loading

Variable	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Goldstein rho	Composite Reliability	AVE
Online Customer Reviews	0.798	0.797	0.801	0.881	0.712
	0.814				
	0.797				
Customer's Attitude	0.857	0.725	0.727	0.845	0.644
	0.880				
	0.793				
Customer's Intention to Purchase	0.776	0.702	0.710	0.811	0.589
	0.738				
	0.788				
Market Competition	0.808	0.7555	0.754	0.860	0.672
	0.804				
	0.846				

Table 1: Model Reliability and Validity

Table 1 is spotted to indicate some of the descriptive statistical measures highlighted by Ab Hamid et al. (2017).

Table 1 is composed of major elements indicated for the analysis based on SMART-PLS. However the table is not the full reflection of descriptive statistical measures. According to Afthanorhan (2013) posited the values of the outer loading range from 0 to 1, and the purpose of using this measure is to indicate the authenticity of every indicator used in the process of research. However, if the values of indicators lie between

0.60 and 0.70, then the researcher may delete the indicators if the deletion of these variables adds significantly to the convergent validity. Relating the table with the measures of internal consistency, it is better to indicate that the range of measures used in table 1 is from 0 to 1 for Cronbach's Alpha, Goldstein rho, and Composite reliability. However, any value that is greater than 0.90 will not be preferred (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). Table 1 also includes elements of convergent validity, i.e., outer loading, composite reliability, and AVE (Adeleke et al., 2015).

However, if the value of AVE exceeds 0.50, then the use of AVE is sufficient to highlight convergent validity without relying on outer loading and composite reliability (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

Hence, through considering Table 1, it is optimal to declare that the model developed for this study is efficient as it fulfills all the criteria required for

construct reliability, composite reliability, and convergent validity. The claim is valid: the values for reliability indicators like Cronbach's alpha, Goldstein rho and Composite reliability all are with values of 0.70 or above. Similarly, Table 1 also reflects convergent validity due to sufficient outcome values of outer loading, composite reliability, and AVE.

	Customer Attitude	Customer Reviews	Customer's Intention to Purchase online	Market Competition	Moderating Effect 1
Customer Attitude					
Customer Reviews	0.795				
Customer's Intention to Purchase online	0.770	0.632			
Market Competition	0.834	0.686	0.687		
Moderating Effect 1	0.089	0.036	0.097	0.021	

Table 2: Discriminant Validity through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

Table 2 reflects discriminant validity through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio. Malik et al. (2021) indicated that the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio is the correlation to show that variables used in the study are mutually exclusive from each other in quantitative as well as qualitative measures. This is the best measure of correlation that is used to indicate discriminant validity, but to reflect discriminant validity through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio there is a need to follow specific

criteria. Therefore, values achieved at the junction of two variables must be lower than or equal to 0.85. Otherwise, discriminant validity cannot be assured through the use of the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (Hair et al., 2019). However, Table 2 does not have any value that is equal to or greater than 0.85. Hence, in the light of the above-mentioned parameters it is optimal to reflect that the model developed for this study also accompanied with discriminant validity and all the variables used are distinctive from each other.

R Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Customer Attitude	0.668	0.632
Customer's Intention to Purchase online	0.516	0.502

Table 3: Quality Criteria (Coefficient of Determination)

Table 3 is a reflection of quality criteria for the research model used in this study. This tool is also termed as Predictive Accuracy. Use of this tool is to validate structural and measurement models used in the study (Purwanto et al., 2020). According to Wong (2013) use of this tool is used to assess the percentage change that is sustained in the dependent variable through one percent change in the independent variable. However, there is a certain extent of the change that is

deemed necessary for considering the validity of the path-coefficient. The lowest acceptable change is 25% in the values of the dependent variable; however, if the change results in 50%, then it would be termed as moderate change and 75% or above termed as substantial change. Therefore, it is optimal to declare that the model of this study is fit for further assessment and change in 1% on independent variable also bringing significant change in both of the dependent variables.

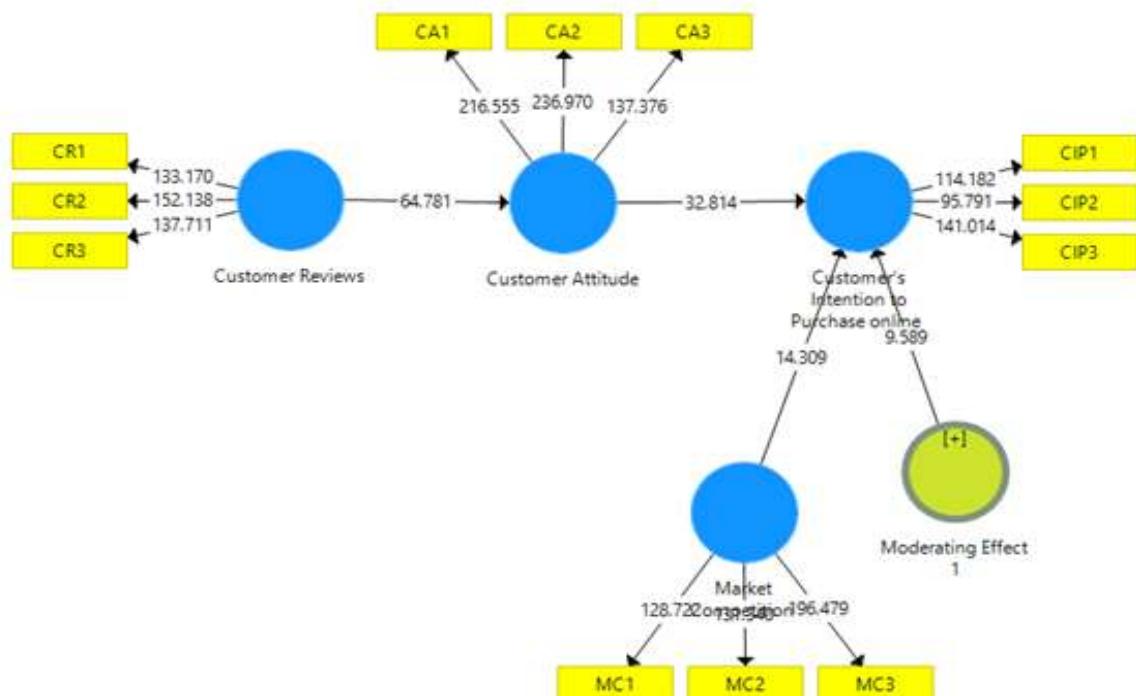


Figure 3: Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Customer Attitude \rightarrow Customer's Intention to Purchase online	0.433	0.434	0.013	32.814	0.000
Customer Reviews \rightarrow Customer Attitude	0.607	0.607	0.009	64.781	0.000
Market Competition \rightarrow Customer's Intention to Purchase online	-0.198	0.198	0.014	14.309	0.000
Moderating Effect 1 \rightarrow Customer's Intention to Purchase online	0.109	0.109	0.011	9.589	0.000

Table 4: Path Coefficient

Table 4 is the path coefficient, and the tool is used to determine the relationship between the variables of interest. This analysis is associated with inferential statistical analysis related to the measurement model of SMART-PLS (Silaparasetti et al., 2017). However, for determining the association there is a need to use some appropriate measures that are provided to researchers as p-values and t-statistical values. The p-value must be less than or equal to 0.05, while the t-statistical value must be greater than or equal to 1.97 (Hair et al., 2017 & Hair et al.,

2019). Hence, in the light of the criteria mentioned by Hair et al (2017); Hair et al (2019) and Silaparasetti et al. (2017), it is worthwhile to mention that all the relationships that are tested through SEM are found to be true. Therefore, it is optimal to declare the acceptance of H_1A , & H_2A . Moreover, findings of the study also confirm the acceptance of H_4A as market competition significantly reduces the intensity of linkage between customer's attitude and intention to purchase in the fast-food industry. Hence, the

moderating impact of market competition is proved.

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Customer Reviews → Customer Attitude → Customer's Intention to Purchase online	0.263	0.263	0.009	28.637	0.000

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effect

Table 5 is used to reflect the mediation analysis of customer's attitude in between the relationship of online customer reviews and customer's intention to purchase. However, the criteria are the same that are used to validate the relationship in the case of the path-coefficient (Table 4). Hence, it is optimal to declare that by the points mentioned by Hair et al. (2017) and Hair et al (2019), it is optimal to declare the presence of mediation of customer's attitude between online customer reviews and customer's intention to purchase online. Hence, it is optimal to reject H_3O

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion:

This study employed SMART-PLS for comprehensive statistical analysis, clearly presenting both descriptive and inferential results. The research model, developed through theoretical triangulation, effectively addresses relevant gaps in the context of developing Asian markets, particularly Pakistan. Its academic and practical significance is evident from the findings, which show that online customer reviews significantly influence customer attitudes toward local fast-food restaurants in Karachi, and these positive attitudes translate into higher purchase intentions. However, the intense competition within the local fast-food sector can diminish customers' willingness to choose specific restaurants.

Discussion:

The statistical results confirmed all study claims, as all alternative hypotheses were accepted. This validates the theoretical triangulation used in developing the research model, including Dissonance Theory, Social Proof Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, each appropriately aligned with the research problem, questions, and hypotheses.

The findings align with prior literature (e.g., Wielki, 2020; Yang et al., 2019), confirming that positive online customer reviews significantly influence customer attitudes, which in turn strengthen purchase intentions. These results are consistent with both general studies (e.g., Alghamdi et al., 2024; Ramadhan et al., 2024) and research specific to Pakistan's fast-food sector (e.g., Batool et al., 2023; Zahid et al., 2022).

The study also validates the mediating role of customer attitude between online reviews and purchase intention, consistent with works such as Udayana and Indarya (2024), Laksana et al. (2025), and Rosyada and Saktiana (2024). Finally, the moderating effect of competition is supported, aligning with Ahmed et al. (2022) and similar findings from Chang & Yu (2023), Tat et al. (2011), and Wulandari and Istikomah (2024).

Policy Implications:

This study is one of the prime studies that signifies the importance of positive online customer reviews on customers' attitudes and intentions to purchase from local fast food restaurants in Karachi. Therefore, the findings of this study may also be used for effective policy-making related to the posting of online comments. Hence, in line with the problem statement of this study, use of rating or any sort of numeric data must become essential for online reviews. By incorporating this point, online reviews will never create ambiguity or misleading impact on the purchase intention of other customers. Similar point has also been highlighted by the study of Kim et al. (2016) and Mudambi and Schuff (2010). Hence, it will be much easier for customers to interpret the quality of food and related aspects like services, etc. These types of ratings and comments may also serve as the policy benchmark and may inform food control authorities about the quality assurance and protocols for initiating required actions against



low-quality food providers. Similar points were also highlighted by the study of Boehnke and Graham (2000), which means the use of numeric rating in online reviews is not only beneficial for customers but also for the control mechanism of foods. Thus, it may lead to holistic improvement and optimization of quality related aspects of the restaurant.

FUTURE NEEDS OF RESEARCH

This study is one of the prime studies that have been conducted on the importance of online customer reviews and their impact on customer intention to purchase from local fast food restaurants in Karachi. However, further studies may also be conducted to understand customer intention towards local generic restaurants or local Chinese restaurants, etc. Similarly, further studies may be conducted through incorporating effective mediators, serial mediators e.g., customer's trust and customer's satisfaction etc or parallel mediators like hedonic attitude and utilitarian attitude etc. Moreover, research work may also be conducted through incorporating effective moderators, e.g. price.

BACKGROUND

Word of Mouth Communications have significant ability to influence thoughts and thinking processes but this form of communication can also significantly influence consumer buying behavior (Blaakrishnan et al., 2014).

Businesses leverage word-of-mouth (WOM) and viral marketing to influence customer behavior through social proof (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). With the rise of Web 2.0 tools—such as social media, consumer forums, and blogs—electronic WOM (e-WOM) has gained significant importance (Blaakrishnan et al., 2014). Unlike seller-provided product information, e-WOM offers consumer-centered evaluations that enhance customer attention, knowledge, and interest while reaching wider audiences. However, online retailers can influence such reviews by controlling which customer comments are published, as seen on platforms like Epinions.com (Park et al., 2007).

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