# MAILBAGS ON CUSTOMER INTENTION TO PURCHASE: EVIDENCE THROUGH THE CUSTOMERS OF FAST-FOOD RESTAURANTS OF KARACHI

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**ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of conducting this research is to understand the impact of online customer reviews on customers' intention to purchase from fast-food restaurants in Karachi. A review of prior literature makes evident the lack of research that may reflect upon the importance of online customer reviews on customer intention to purchase from Asian Developing markets. There is a significant lack of studies that incorporate the Theory of Planned Behavior to assess the impact. Hence, this study has been formulated through emphasizing theoretical triangulation for model authenticity and applicability in local settings. Data has been collected through using convenience sampling from the customers of local fast food restaurants and the sample size for this study was 275. Statistical assessment was made through using the third version of SMART-PLS and after statistical testing it has been revealed that online customer reviews are perceived as an important tool for affecting customer intention to purchase. However, intensive competition in the fast-food industry also has the tendency to decrease customer intention to purchase from focused fast-food restaurants.*

***Keywords:*** *Online Customer Reviews, Customer's Attitude, Customer's Intention to purchase, Competition, Theory of Planned Behavior, Fast-Food Industry & Local Fast-Food Restaurant.*

## 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 forms, 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:
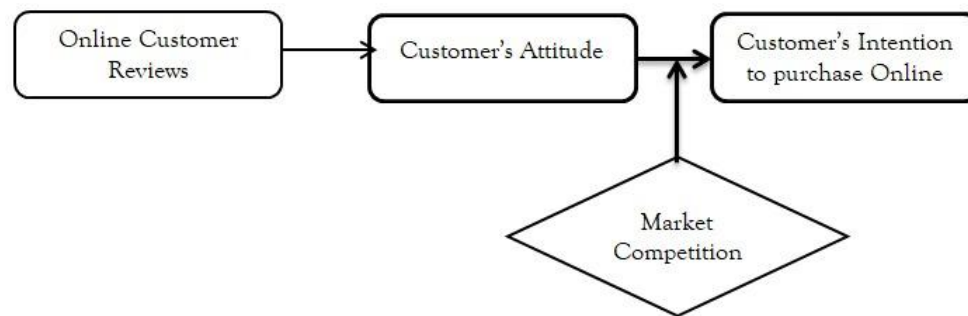


**Figure 1:** Research Model

## 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 are more inclined to select products with adequate ratings and reviews when presented with a choice. Customers who are satisfied with their purchases frequently tell others about them online or via word-of-mouth. Moreover, positive customer reviews lessen the perceived risk included in buying a novel or untested product.

Similarly, positive ratings on a product usually result in increased conversion rates (Yang et al., 2019). Similar sorts of points are reflected by research conducted concerning fast-food restaurants that online customer reviews are the indications of customer perception related to food, ambiance, pricing and services, etc (Gan et al., 2017 & Yalçinkaya & Just, 2023). However, local fast food restaurants are a better source to study the impact of online customer reviews as they receive less polarized customer comments in comparison to the well-known fast food 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.

However, indicators for most of the variables like Customer Reviews and Customer's Intention to Purchase are adapted from Dwidienawati et al (2020). However, the study of Dwidienawati et al. (2020) is not associated with the customer's attitude. Therefore, the indicators for customer attitude are adapted from Gilbert et al (2004) and Ghoochani et al (2019) Similarly use of competition has been used for the first time in the studies related with online customer reviews and customer's intention to purchase. Hence, in order to incorporate elements of market competition effectively researchers used 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.

Other studies also added to the significance of SEM and marked the tool as a more efficient tool than regression. However, its impact became substantial through the use of SMART-PLS.

SMART-PLS is the latest edition to the category of software that is preferred and used by researchers for assessment based on primary data. To be effective in assessment SMART-PLS uses two different models termed the inner (measurement) model and outer (structural) model (Wong, 2013). Analysis through SMART-PLS begins with an outer model, which is based upon the association between construct and observed indicators (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). Similarly, the inner model is based on the association between latent variables (Wong, 2013). Hence, legitimate to believe that SMART-PLS is one of the best software that can highlight all the necessary paths and relationships in the research model (Vijaybanu & Arunkumar, 2018)
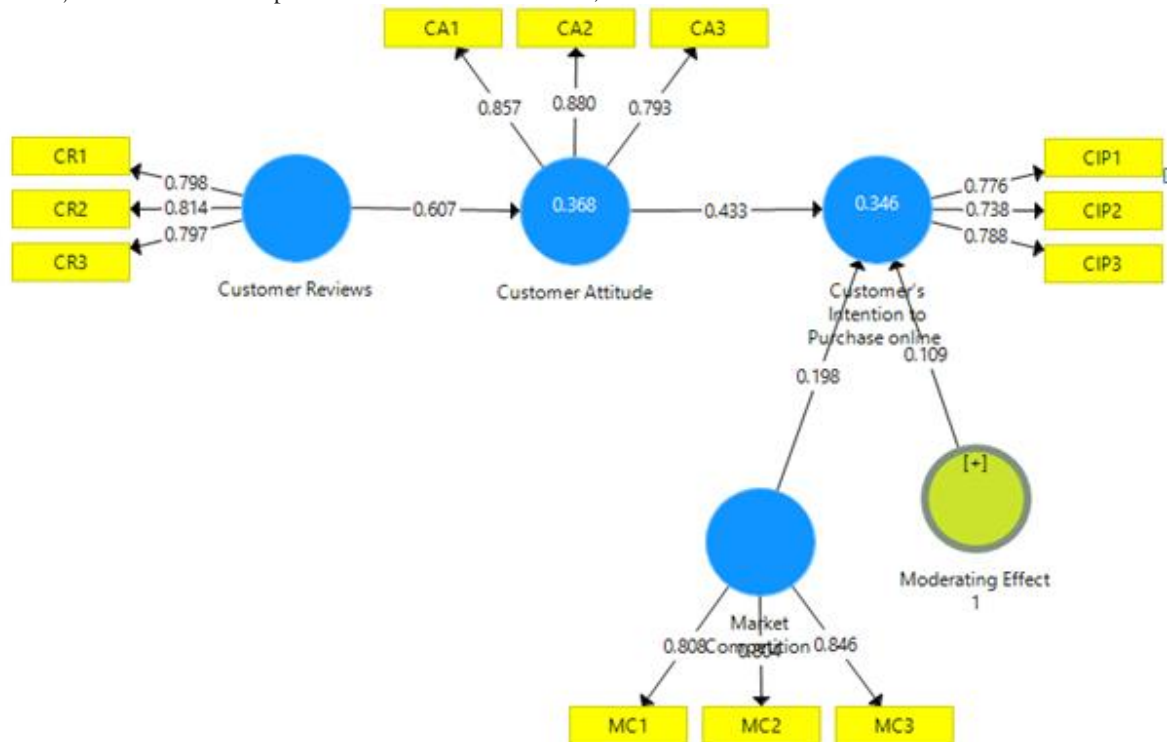


**Figure 2:** Outer Loading

| Variable | Outer Loading | Cronabach'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 Heterotrai-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.
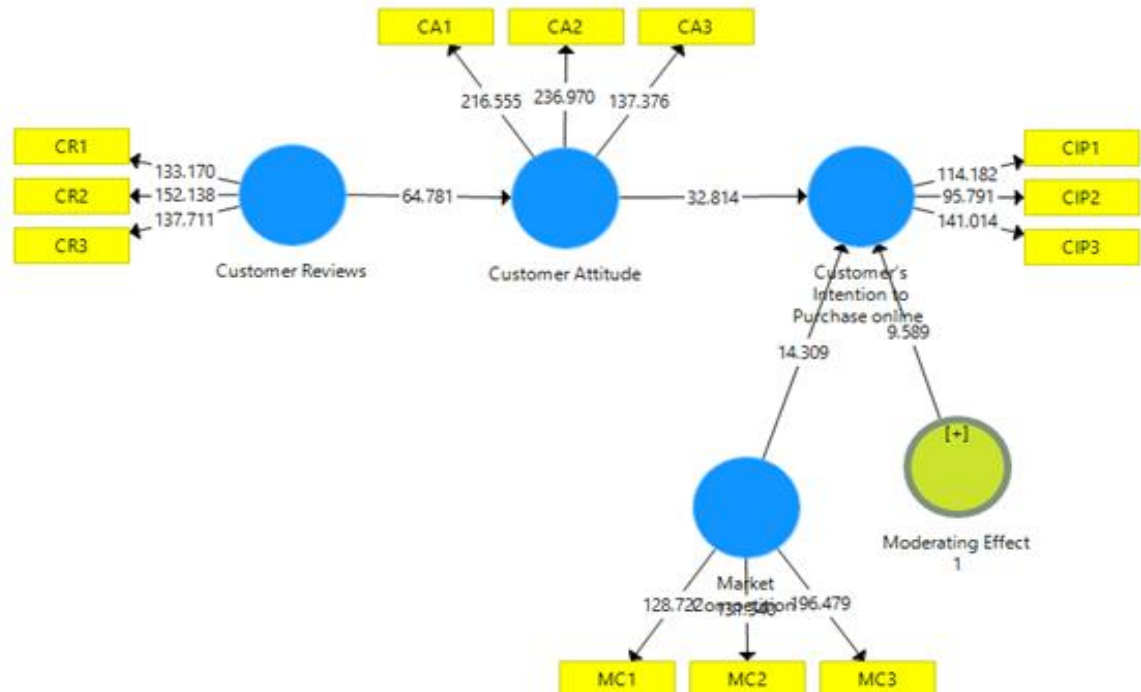


**Figure 3:** Path Coefficient

|  | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (|O/STDEV|) | P Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Customer Attitude -> Customer's Intention to Purchase online | 0.433 | 0.434 | 0.013 | 32.814 | 0.000 |
| Customer Reviews -> Customer Attitude | 0.607 | 0.607 | 0.009 | 64.781 | 0.000 |
| Market Competition -> Customer's Intention to Purchase online | -0.198 | 0.198 | 0.014 | 14.309 | 0.000 |
| Moderating Effect 1 -> 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 H₁A, & H₂A. Moreover, findings of the study also confirm the acceptance of H₄A 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 H₃O

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, & POLICY IMPLICATIONS
### Conclusion:
This study has been supplemented with thorough statistical analysis through SMART-PLS that highlighted explicitly the descriptive parameters and inferential statistical analytics of data. Hence, after thorough analysis, researchers can indicate that the development of the research model through theoretical triangulation was an effective element.

The developed model is not unique but has also been developed on realistic research gaps that are required to be tested concerning the developing Asian Markets and Pakistan. Hence, the significance of the model and research has been justified concerning the pragmatic and academic perspectives. This academic and pragmatic significance has also been proved through the outcomes of the study that indicated the definite impact of online customer reviews over the customer attitude towards the local fast food restaurants of Karachi, and positive attitude has also been translated positively towards intention to purchase from local fast food restaurants. However, competition in the category of local fast-food restaurants is significantly high, and the severity of competition has a high tendency to reduce customers' willingness to purchase from focal restaurants.

### Discussion:
After detailed statistical testing, it has been confirmed that all the claims related to this study are true. This statement has been made due to the acceptance of alternative hypotheses for every proposition. Therefore, initially, this study affirms the theoretical triangulation used for the development of the research model, research questions, and research hypotheses. Hence, the use of Dissonance Theory (Li et al., 2000 & Xu et al 2022), Social Proof Theory (Bustinza et al., 2019), and TPB (Ajzen, 1991 & Wielki, 2020) were all found to be justified with the topic formulation, statement of problem, research questions, and research hypotheses all seems to be valid. Moving towards the major claims of this study to discuss each one of these claims effectively, it has been noticed that initially, the findings of this study are consistent with Wielki (2020) and Yang et al. (2019), who advocate the impact of online positive customer review over customer attitude. A similar is also valid for the association of customer's attitude with customer's intention to purchase as findings of this study confirm the association. Hence, findings are positively associated with the generic associations e.g., Alghamdi et al. (2024); Ramadhan et al., (2024); Lahap et al. (2024) Shanbhogue and Ranjith (2024) & also for Pakistan and Fast Food

Business e.g., Batool et al (2023) and Zahid et al (2022) etc.

At last, it is also legitimate to declare that the findings of the study are also found to be consistent with the indirect association of online customer reviews on customers' intention to purchase through the mediation of customer's attitude. Thus, found to be associated with Udayana and Indarya (2024) generically while with Laksana et al. (2025) and Rosyada and Saktiana (2024), etc, in terms of fast-food restaurants. Lastly, it is also required to validate the use of competition as the moderating variable. The results of the study justify the use as the moderator as used by Ahmed et al. (2022), which makes this study also consistent with 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 frequently attempt to use the power of word-of-mouth (WOM) by launching viral marketing initiatives that entice customers to tell their networks about goods and services. This uses the idea of social proof, which holds that individuals should base their behavior on the views and behaviors of others (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). Similar points are made for Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) that is gaining mass popularity with the increase in use of the internet. Especially through the increase in the use of Web 2.0 tools, including social networking sites, consumer network sites and blogs, etc. (Blaakrishnan et al., 2014).

Comparison of product information provided by sellers and e-WoM by customers is one of the most prominent reasons for the increase in the importance of e-WoM because of the difference in objective of using Web 2.0 tools. Similar studies have been validated by studies that sellers tend to provide more objective product-focused with a standard format while e-WoM are the source of consumer-centric information that is written to provide product evaluation. Hence, the e-WoM can create a much better impact on customer attention, knowledge, and interest and may also reach across geographical boundaries. However, with the advent of technology, online retailers can now control the reviews from customers. The

most common example includes licensing of online comments by online retailers through using Epionion.com, etc. Hence, e-retailers can control the publication of comments over the website to influence customer minds (Park et al., 2007)

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