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Factors Affecting Word of Mouth (WOM) Behaviour in Restaurant Industry: A Study on Rangpur City

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Abstract

This study examines the factors that drive consumers' word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior regarding restaurants in Rangpur City. Using a structured questionnaire, the research investigates how various aspects, such as food quality, personal interaction quality, physical environment quality, and perceived value, influence customers' WOM behavior. Data were collected from restaurant patrons through the questionnaire, and the analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS-4. The model accounted for 46.4% of the variance in WOM behavior. The results indicate that both the quality of the physical environment and perceived value have a significant positive impact on WOM behavior, while food quality and personal interaction quality do not show a notable effect. The findings highlight the increasing importance of experiential and value-driven strategies for restaurant businesses. Additionally, the study discusses its practical implications, theoretical contributions, and suggests directions for future research.

Keywords: *Word of Mouth (WOM), Restaurant Industry, Customer Satisfaction, Bangladesh – Rangpur City, SmartPLS*
JEL Classification: M31, M37, D12, C83

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Introduction

Over the decades, the restaurant industry has witnessed tremendous growth in Bangladesh. It significantly impacts the nation's socio-economic development by contributing to GDP growth, employment generation, and urban lifestyle transformation. Over the past decade, the sector has experienced remarkable expansion, with market size increasing from approximately USD 1.8 billion in 2014 to over USD 4.3 billion in 2024, alongside a nearly twofold rise in employment. As of 2021, about 1.15 million people were employed in Bangladesh's broader accommodation food service industry. The Bangladesh restaurant and food service market is estimated to be USD 3.79 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 7.47 billion by 2029, growing at a CAGR of 14.50% during this period.(*Bangladesh Foodservice Market Size & Share Analysis - Industry Research Report - Growth Trends*, n.d.; *Report on the Restaurants & Food Service Industry in Bangladesh. Upturn*, n.d.)

This growth is driven by rising disposable incomes, changing food habits, increasing urbanization, and the proliferation of digital food delivery services. Similar to Bangladesh, the number of restaurants in Rangpur is increasing significantly. Once characterized by a modest and largely informal food service sector, now hosts a vibrant mix of traditional eateries, modern cafés, and branded quick-service restaurants, reflecting broader national trends. Compared to ten years ago, when dining out was occasional and limited to a few establishments, today's Rangpur offers diverse culinary options and an evolving food culture, particularly among youth and middle-income families. It is observed that, although notable numbers of restaurants open in Rangpur each year, only a small number of them can continue their operations year-round. It is thus important to understand the factors that can lead to successful business operations over the years. Evidence shows that word-of-mouth communication positively impacts consumers' decision-making and brand advocacy, especially in the restaurant industry. In Rangpur City, where the urban dining culture is rapidly evolving, it has become essential to understand the factors that motivate customers to recommend or discuss their restaurant experiences for business growth. In addition to fundamental service elements such as food quality and customer interaction, the perceptions of value and the physical environment significantly influence customer satisfaction and WOM behavior. This study focuses on these constructs to uncover the key drivers of WOM in Rangpur's restaurant landscape.

Having said that, with the significant growth of the restaurant business in Rangpur over the past decades, there is limited empirical evidence on what truly influences customer word-of-mouth behavior. While prior research has addressed service quality and satisfaction, fewer studies have explored the combined effects of perceived food quality, service interaction, physical environment quality, and value perception on WOM behavior. This study tried to investigate these issues.

Research Objectives

1. Identify the demographic profile and behavioral characteristics of the restaurant clients in Rangpur.
2. Evaluate the influence of quality of food, personal interactions, physical environment, and the perceived value on consumers' word-of-mouth behavior.

3. Explore the interrelationships among the quality of food, personal interactions, physical environment, the perceived value and their contribution to WOM behavior.
4. Provide strategic implications for restaurant managers to improve WOM through enhancements in service, food, ambiance, and overall value.

Research Questions

1. What are the demographic and behavioral traits of patrons frequenting dining establishments and what types of meals do they typically consume?
2. How does the quality of food, personal interactions, state of the physical environment, and perceived value influence customers' WOM behavior?
3. Among the elements of food quality (QF), personal interaction quality (PIQ), physical environment quality (PEQ), and perceived value (PV), which one profoundly impacts word-of-mouth communication behavior?

Significance of the Study

The results derived from this investigation will serve to enhance the understanding of restaurant proprietors, managerial personnel, and marketing professionals by elucidating the fundamental factors that influence customer recommendations and overall satisfaction. By understanding which factors most influence WOM behavior, stakeholders can tailor their strategies to enhance customer experiences and expand their customer base through positive WOM.

Literature Review

Word of Mouth (WOM) Behavior

"Word of mouth is defined as some type of communication between two or more connected customers or potential customers. Such communication can take the form of verbal, face-to-face communication or many other means, including e-mail, telephone, cell-phone-based text messages, blogs, instant messaging, social network software (e.g., Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn), and so on" (p.325). (Bonfrer, 2010)

WOM significantly affects consumer awareness, perceptions, and purchasing decisions. Positive WOM can enhance brand image and increase sales, while negative WOM can deter potential customers (Lestari, 2024). Researchers have predominantly observed correlations between demographic factors and the phenomenon of word of mouth, encompassing both affirmative and adverse aspects. Factors such as education level, income, and region of residence can influence the likelihood of engaging in WOM. For instance, higher education levels are associated with more positive WOM (Berry, 2024)WOM is pervasive, reaching a wide audience across various cultures and industries. It is also persuasive due to its perceived credibility and trustworthiness compared to traditional advertising. A significant proportion of consumers engage in WOM, with studies indicating that more than half of consumers rely on it for decision-making (Lang, 2006). Engaging in WOM can lead to self-enhancement for the sender, which can motivate further WOM behavior. This effect is observed for both positive and negative WOM (Chawdhary & Dall'Olmo Riley,

2015). In the restaurant industry, service quality is a key driver of WOM. High service quality leads to increased satisfaction, which in turn generates positive WOM. It also a cost-effective marketing tool for restaurants, allowing them to reach potential customers without significant investment in traditional advertising (Hyun & Heo, 2010). While WOM is a potent tool for influencing consumer behavior, it is important to consider the potential downsides. Negative WOM can spread just as quickly as positive WOM and can have a more substantial impact on consumer perceptions and decisions. Businesses must actively manage their service quality and customer relationships to mitigate the risks associated with negative WOM. Additionally, the rise of electronic WOM (eWOM) presents both opportunities and challenges, as digital platforms can amplify both positive and negative feedback at an unprecedented scale (Shih, 2016) (Y.-F. Chen & Law, 2016).

Quality of Food (QF)

Food quality is significantly defined by organoleptic properties, including flavor, color, and texture, which directly affect consumer preferences (Vaclavik & Christian, 2014) ("Determination of Food Quality by Using Spectroscopic Methods," 2013) Nutritional Value: The nutritional worth of food is a vital component of its quality, impacting health and dietary choices (Ogidi et al., 2023). Food quality is a primary driver of customer satisfaction in restaurants, with studies indicating that taste and presentation are critical factor and Enhanced food quality leads to higher satisfaction levels, which in turn fosters positive WOM communication among customers (Kannan, 2017). In the context of food delivery services, food quality was not significantly related to E-WOM, suggesting that service quality may play a more pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors.(Mattayev, 2022).

H1: The quality of food exerts a significant positive influence on Word-of-Mouth behavior.

Personal Interaction Quality (PIQ)

Personal interaction quality refers to the effectiveness and satisfaction derived from interpersonal exchanges between service providers and customers, particularly in the hospitality sector. It encompasses various dimensions such as empathy, responsiveness, and the overall atmosphere created during these interactions. Understanding personal interaction quality is crucial as it significantly influences customer loyalty and willingness to pay for service. High-quality personal interactions, characterized by empathy, positive attitudes, and attentive service, enhance the dining experience and foster trust (Bieger & Laesser, 2003).

Empathy denotes the capacity to comprehend and resonate with the emotions of others, a critical component in service-related interactions. It allows restaurant staff to connect with customers on an emotional level, enhancing their overall experience (Bove, 2019). Responsiveness involves the willingness and ability to address customer needs promptly. This trait is vital for ensuring that patrons feel valued and heard, which can lead to increased satisfaction("The Impact of

Responsiveness and Empathy on Satisfaction and Loyalty of the PT Citilink Indonesia's Passengers at Kualanamu International Airport," 2023).

H2: The quality of personal interactions demonstrates a significant positive impact on Word-of-Mouth behavior.

Physical Environment Quality (PEQ)

Physical Environment Quality (PEQ) in the restaurant business encompasses aspects like cleanliness, design, ambience, and aesthetics, significantly influencing brand equity by enhancing brand image, loyalty, preference, and leadership, ultimately attracting and satisfying customers in a competitive market (Hanaysha, 2016). The quality of the physical environment significantly influences restaurant image, which in turn affects customer perceived value and satisfaction, ultimately impacting word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations among customers in the restaurant business (Ryu et al., 2012). Physical Environment Quality (PEQ) positively impacts the mental image of a restaurant, enhancing customer perceived value and satisfaction, which in turn influences word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations, as satisfied customers are more likely to promote their experiences to others. (Koshki et al., 2014)

H3: The quality of the physical environment exhibits a significant positive effect on WOM behavior.

Perceived Value (PV)

Perceived value is fundamentally a subjective evaluation by consumers regarding the benefits they receive relative to the costs incurred (Ayiehfor, 2009). Perceived value significantly influences word-of-mouth (WOM) in the restaurant business. Higher perceived value enhances customer affective satisfaction, which positively impacts their participation behaviour and encourages them to share positive experiences through WOM, ultimately benefiting restaurant reputation and customer acquisition.(Khalifa et al., 2025) (Attri & Kushwaha, 2018).

H4: The perceived value manifests a significant helpful influence on WOM behavior.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, the conceptual framework in Figure 1 states that quality of food, personal interaction quality, physical environment quality, and perceived value are independent variables that directly influence the dependent variable—word of mouth behavior.

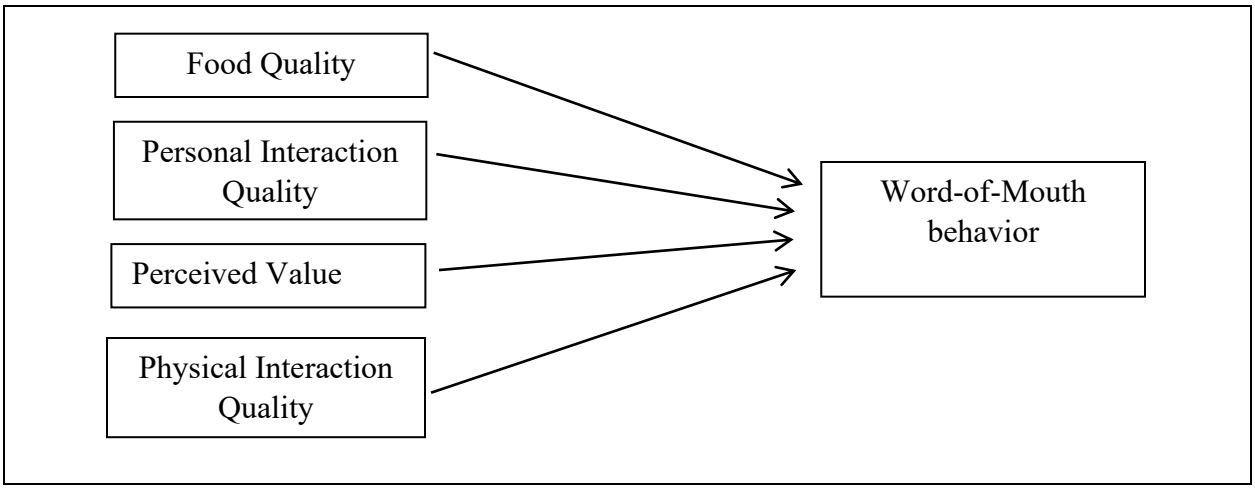

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

This investigation employs a quantitative research framework, utilizing a systematically developed questionnaire as the principal instrument for data collection. The data was collected between 2023 and 2024.

The designated demographic for this research encompasses patrons who frequent dining establishments within Rangpur City. A non-probability convenience sampling methodology was employed. The determination of the sample size was executed utilizing the G* Power 3.1 software application. It streamlines the methodology by permitting users to enter variables and compute sample sizes with ease. (Kang, 2021). To calculate the sample size, the g* Power setting was f2=0.15 (medium), a=0.05 and number of predictors was 4 and the power was set at 85%. In this setting the minimum numbers of sample required to test the model was 95.

Researchers received a total number of 100 firsthand responses through a structured questionnaire. Both face to face and online methods were used to collect data. To collect data through online Kobo Collect was used. Kobo Collect allows for easy form design with minimal technical expertise, making it accessible for researchers and data collectors (Dizon et al., 2022). After checking and cleaning responses a valid 98 responses were finally selected to run and analyze the model.

Section-1: Demographic and behavioral questions like gender, age, religion, profession, visit frequency, meal type.

Section-2: Information about the factors that influence word of mouth behaviors. Measurement items related to Quality of Food (QF), Personal Interaction Quality (PIQ), Physical Environment Quality (PEQ), Perceived Value (PV), and Word of Mouth (WOM), measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly disagree. All constructs were adapted from validated scales in existing literature. The items used to measure the QF were adapted from (Namkung & Jang, 2007), PIQ were adapted from (Vesel & Zabkar, 2009), PEQ was adapted from

(Meng & Elliott, 2008), PV was adapted from (H. Chen, 2012) and WOM was collected from (Jalilvand et al., 2017)

Data was analyzed using both SPSS and SmartPLS-4. Descriptive statistics mean, frequency, percentage were used for demographic and behavioral profiling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS-4 was used to test reliability, validity, and hypothesized relationships among constructs. PLS-Predict were also used to assess out-of-sample predictive power.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic and Behavioral Profile of Respondents

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the sample. The demographic profile of the respondents and their behavioral characteristics while they are dining at restaurants are depicted in following table.

Demographic profile of the respondents:

Table 1 Shows that among the respondents, 77.6 percent were male, and 22.4 percent were female. Respondents were categorized into four cohorts, and the ratios were 56.1% from the 18–25-year segment, 33.7% from the 26-25-year group, 8.2% from the 36–45-year group, and the remaining 2% were from 46-55 years of age. The researcher surveyed from a diversified professional background. Among them, 64.3% were students, 9.2% were government employees, 22.4% were private employees, and 4.1% from an entrepreneurial background. Among the respondents, the majority were Muslims, and the remaining 15.3% were Hindu.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender of the Respondents	Male	76	77.6	77.6	77.6
	Female	22	22.4	22.4	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	
Age group of the respondents	18-25	55	56.1	56.1	56.1
	26-35	33	33.7	33.7	89.8
	36-45	8	8.2	8.2	98.0
	46-55	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	
Profession of the respondents	University level student	63	64.3	64.3	64.3
	Government Employee	9	9.2	9.2	73.5
	Private Employee	22	22.4	22.4	95.9
	Business Owner	4	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	
Religion of the respondents	Muslim	83	84.7	84.7	84.7
	Hindu	15	15.3	15.3	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

Behavioral characteristics of the respondents:

In Table 2 data reveals that a good number of respondents, 31.6% visit restaurants 2 to 3 times in a month, where 29.6% visit less than once in a month, 24.5% once in a month, and 14.3% respondents visit a restaurant regularly, which means weekly or more in a month. When asked about the preferred meals taken at restaurants, 41.8% answered that they prefer to take snacks at restaurants, 29.6% prefer dinner, 24.5% lunch, and 4.1% prefer to have breakfast at a restaurant.

Table 2: Behavioral characteristics of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Frequency of visits in restaurants	Rarely (Less than once in a month)	29	29.6	29.6	29.6
	Occasionally (Once a month)	24	24.5	24.5	54.1
	Frequently (2-3 times a month)	31	31.6	31.6	85.7
	Regularly (Weekly or more)	14	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	
Preferred meal taken at restaurant	Breakfast	4	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Lunch	24	24.5	24.5	28.6
	Snacks	41	41.8	41.8	70.4
	Dinner	29	29.6	29.6	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

Measurement Model Assessment

Two types of validity were examined to assess the measurement model; one is convergent validity and the other is discriminant validity. As a same scale is used to measure the entire dependent and independent variable, a test of common method biased (CMB) was conducted with Herman's single factor test to ensure that it is not biased with common method variance (CMV) (Kock, 2021).

Test of Common Method Bias (CMB)

Harman's single-factor analysis was executed utilizing Principal Component Analysis within the SPSS software to evaluate the likelihood of common method bias. All measurement items were incorporated without any form of rotation. The findings indicated that the leading factor constituted 32.52% (refer to table 8) of the overall variance, which is substantially beneath the 50% benchmark. This suggests that common method bias is improbable to exert a significant impact on the outcomes of the study. (Batista-Foguet et al., 2014).

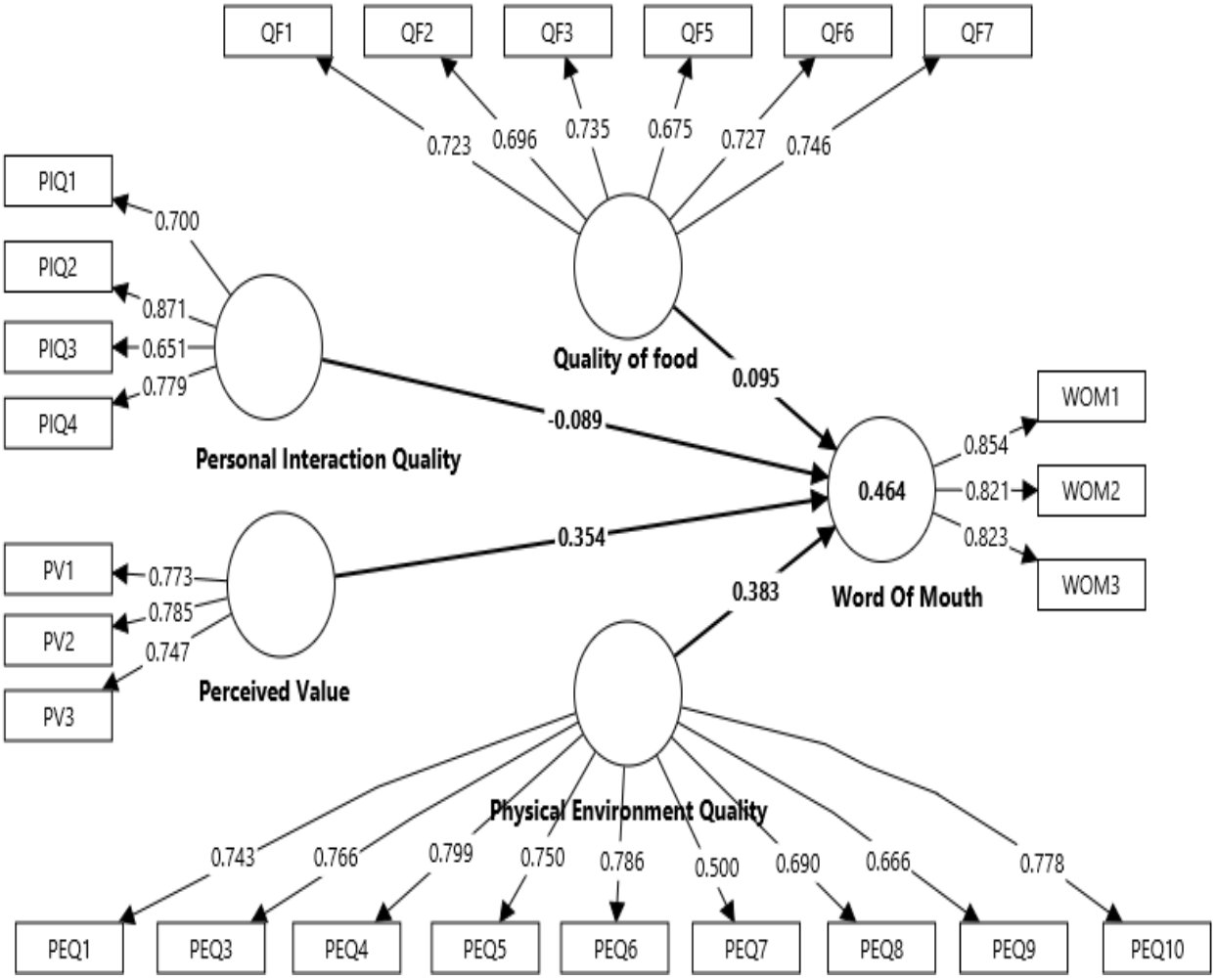

Figure 2: WOM behavior in Restaurant PLS Model

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is a crucial aspect of construct validation, assessed through indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). A common threshold for indicator loadings is 0.50, meaning indicators should ideally load above this value to demonstrate a strong relationship with their latent constructs (Memon et al., 2021). In this study, Table 3 shows that most items' loading exceeded 0.70. In this study, one item from perceived environment quality (PEQ2) has been deleted from the model as its item loading was 0.373. Cronbach alpha lies between the recommended threshold value 0.70 to 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019) except perceived value but A low Cronbach's alpha (e.g., PV = 0.655) is acceptable when CR > 0.7. CR values are greater than 0.70 for all constructs, indicating strong internal consistency for all constructs, AVE meets the recommended values generally above 0.50, supporting convergent validity.

Table 3: PLS-SMART outcomes

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Physical Environment Quality	PEQ1	0.743	0.887	0.908	0.526
	PEQ10	0.778			
	PEQ3	0.766			
	PEQ4	0.799			
	PEQ5	0.750			
	PEQ6	0.786			
	PEQ7	0.500			
	PEQ8	0.690			
	PEQ9	0.666			
Personal Interaction Quality	PIQ1	0.700	0.757	0.840	0.570
	PIQ2	0.871			
	PIQ3	0.651			
	PIQ4	0.779			
Perceived Value	PV1	0.773	0.655	0.812	0.590
	PV2	0.785			
	PV3	0.747			
Quality of food	QF1	0.723	0.813	0.864	0.514
	QF2	0.696			
	QF3	0.735			
	QF5	0.675			
	QF6	0.727			
	QF7	0.746			
Word Of Mouth	WOM1	0.854	0.779	0.872	0.694
	WOM2	0.821			
	WOM3	0.823			

Discriminant Validity

An alternative approach based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix, to assess discriminant validity is suggested by (Henseler et al., 2015) in the form of heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. All the HTMT values presented in Table 4 are below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90 (or 0.85), ranging from 0.318 to 0.825, This indicates that discriminant validity has been successfully established for all constructs in the model.

Table 4: Discriminant validity (HTMT Ratio) PLS-SMART outcomes

Sl. No.	Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
1	Perceived Value					
2	Personal Interaction Quality	0.674				
3	Physical Environment Quality	0.678	0.397			
4	Quality of food	0.807	0.575	0.825		
5	Word of Mouth	0.791	0.318	0.689	0.661	

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships between the psychological constructs and Word of Mouth (WOM) behavior. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS. The R^2 value for WOM was 0.472, indicating moderate explanatory power.

Table 5: (Path Coefficient, T-Statistic, P-Value) PLS-SMART outcomes

Hypothesis	Relationships	Path Coefficient	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	Quality of food -> Word of Mouth	0.095	0.678	0.249	Not Supported
H2	Personal Interaction Quality -> Word of Mouth	-0.089	0.892	0.186	Not Supported
H3	Physical Environment Quality -> Word of Mouth	0.383	3.506	0.000	Supported
H4	Perceived Value -> Word of Mouth	0.354	2.477	0.007	Supported

These findings align with prior research emphasizing the influence of service atmosphere and perceived value over traditional service or food-based predictors in certain contexts (Zeithaml, 1988 and Bitner, 1992).

Table 6 presents the results of a PLS-SMART (Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling) analysis, detailing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), R-squared (R^2) values, and effect sizes (f^2) for various hypotheses related to factors influencing Word of Mouth (WOM) in a restaurant. Multicollinearity among predictors, the explanatory power of the model, and the practical significance of each predictor's effect on WOM described by VIF for multicollinearity, R2 for overall model fit, and effect size (f^2) to
quantify the strength of each relationship.

Table 6: (VIF, Effect size and) PLS-SMART outcomes

Hypothesis	Relationships	VIF	R2	Effect Size F2
H1	Quality of food -> Word of Mouth	2.436	0.464	0.007
H2	Personal Interaction Quality -> Word of Mouth	1.410		0.010
H3	Physical Environment Quality -> Word of Mouth	2.119		0.129
H4	Perceived Value -> Word of Mouth	1.806		0.129

Out-of-Sample Predictive Power Assessment (PLS-Predict)

Table 7 presents the out-of-sample predictive power of the Word of Mouth (WOM) construct within a Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equation model applied to restaurant behavior.

Table 7: (out-of-sample predictive power) PLS-SMART outcomes

	Q²predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	PLS-SEM_MAE	LM_RMSE	LM_MAE	IA_RMSE	IA_MAE
WOM1	0.282	0.684	0.531	0.818	0.633	0.807	0.65
WOM2	0.229	0.769	0.538	0.816	0.578	0.876	0.707
WOM3	0.256	0.889	0.679	1.078	0.779	1.03	0.837

Table 7 provides key metrics that assess how well the model can predict new, unseen data, specifically focusing on the three indicators of WOM: WOM1, WOM2, and WOM3. This helps determine the model's ability to generalize new data.

Q²predict (Predictive Relevance)

Q²predict values for WOM1, WOM2, and WOM3. A positive Q²predict value indicates that the model has predictive relevance for the specific indicator. WOM1 has a Q²predict of 0.282, WOM2 has 0.229, and WOM3 has 0.256. All these positive values suggest that the model has good predictive relevance for the Word-of-Mouth construct's indicators.

PLS-SEM_RMSE and PLS-SEM_MAE (Root Mean Square Error and Mean Absolute Error from PLS-SEM)

These metrics represent the average magnitude of the errors between the predicted values and the actual values, derived directly from the PLS-SEM estimation process. Lower values indicate better predictive accuracy.

For PLS-SEM_RMSE for WOM1, WOM2 and WOM3 are 0.684, 0.769 and 0.889 all are lower than LM_RMSE of WOM1, WOM2 and WOM3 respectively 0.818, 0.816 and 1.078 suggesting that the PLS-SMART model provides better out-of-sample predictive power for the WOM indicators.

Conclusion

This study examined the psychological factors affecting Word of Mouth behavior in the restaurant industry of Rangpur City. The results revealed that Physical Environment Quality and Perceived Value significantly influence WOM behavior, while Quality of Food and Personal Interaction Quality do not. These insights are valuable for both theory and practice, especially in contexts where customer perceptions are shaped more by value and ambiance than by traditional service cues.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the service marketing and consumer behavior literature by confirming the importance of perceived value and physical environment in driving WOM behavior in the restaurant industry. It also supports the idea that customer advocacy is influenced by experiential

and contextual factors rather than solely by core service components like food or interaction quality (Ladhari et al., 2008).

Managerial Implications

Restaurant managers in Rangpur and similar settings should focus on enhancing physical ambiance and delivering value-oriented experiences. Investments in clean, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing environments can significantly increase customer recommendations. Furthermore, ensuring customers perceive a fair exchange between what they pay and what they receive can foster positive WOM.

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