

SERVICE QUALITY AND WORD OF MOUTH IN QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS - CONSIDERING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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Abstract

The study examines the impact of service quality parameters and price fairness on customer satisfaction and word of mouth generation for quick-service restaurants (QSRs) for an emerging nation - Bangladesh. To add to this, the author analyzes the effect of the mediating variable, customer satisfaction, between service quality attributes and word of mouth generation. Through a comprehensive literature review, a modified SERVQUAL model comprising of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and convenience attributes was proposed to evaluate the effect on Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Word of Mouth (WOM) in the context of the QSRs. The study utilizes a structured questionnaire survey targeting customers visiting selected quick-service restaurants in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study reveals that the SERVQUAL attributes- reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, and convenience- have significant associations with customer satisfaction and WOM. However, price fairness does not impact customer satisfaction and WOM generation in the case of QSRs. Furthermore, CS partially mediates the relationship between the modified SERVQUAL parameters and WOM generation. To the best of the author's knowledge, this study extends previous research on using the SERVQUAL model to analyze the impact of service quality on CS. Furthermore, the author believes this is one of the pioneer studies that examines the adoption of a modified SERVQUAL model to measure the effect on CS and WOM in the QSR setting in the context of Bangladesh.

Keywords : *Bangladesh, Customer Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, Quick-service Restaurants, Word of Mouth.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the restaurant industry has grown across the world. In the last few decades, the industry has become an ever-present part of consumers' everyday lives in developed countries. In the USA alone, the restaurant industry's size reached \$800 billion in 2017 (Lock, 2020) compared to the mere worth of \$42 million in 1970 (Lock, 2020). This reveals not only the growth of the sector but also the ubiquitous nature of the industry. Owing to the changing consumer habits, research shows the the quick-service restaurant segment has flourished. Quick-service restaurants, aka QSRs, is the standard industry term used to define fast-food settings (Celentano, 2019). Global fast-food chains such as KFC, Burger King and Pizza Hut are examples of QSRs. In 2018, the QSR restaurant segment's estimated worth in the USA was \$299 billion growing from \$150 billion in 2007 (Lock, 2019).

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In recent years, the flourishing of the restaurant industry, and in particular, the QSR segment, can be observed in emerging nations like Bangladesh. According to Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury, Executive Director, Transcom Beverages Limited, the quick-service industry's market size is estimated to be valued at approximately \$53 million by 2022 and is expected to grow in the coming years (Mahruf et al., 2017).

With an average GDP growth rate of over 6.5% over the last few years, with a growth rate of 3.8% during 2020 (Plecher, 2020), Bangladesh has fared better than its peer emerging nations during the Covid pandemic as well. An increase in the family income to go with the trend of urbanization and the growing number of working women has attributed to changes in consumer behavior patterns (Chowdhury, 2020), leading to the tendency to eat out and spend less time preparing food. This has contributed to the burgeoning of the QSR industry in the country. With the increasing presence of local and global brands in the country, one can observe fierce competition among the QSRs. Thus, competition among these QSRs means the onus is on these service providers to bring forth superior dining experiences and customer satisfaction (Mason et al., 2013).

Prior studies reveal that service quality is critical to have a satisfied consumer base (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2009). Therefore, the link between service quality and customer satisfaction is a central focus in the QSR setting, as customer satisfaction is a critical metric for a restaurant's sustainability. Customer satisfaction is vital in improving the company's profitability (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Tussyadiah, 2016). Prior research by Ryu et al. (2010) reveals a significant positive association between customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth (WOM) generation- metric having the most considerable impact on the consumer's perception about a firm (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Previous studies in the restaurant setting by Qin and Prybutok (2009), Shahzadi et al. (2018), and Richardson et al. (2019) point towards the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intention such as WOM generation. Studies by Shahzadi et al. (2018) and Richardson et al. (2019) also link specific service quality attributes to behavioral intentions.

A study of previous literature also reveals that studies have focused on the well-established SERVQUAL framework and its variations as well as attributes from this framework to analyze customer satisfaction and, in some cases, behavioral intentions (Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Shahzadi et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). However, with most studies focusing on the impact of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction (e.g., Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006), this study aims to analyze the effect of a modified SERVQUAL model, incorporating the convenience dimension, on customer satisfaction and word of mouth generation. To the best of the author's knowledge, a limited number of studies have included this dimension or undertaken analysis of the proposed framework for an emerging nation such as Bangladesh. Furthermore, the study examines the mediating impact of customer satisfaction on the relationship between the proposed attributes and WOM generation.

This current section is followed by a literature review section, where the service quality dimensions, customer satisfaction, and WOM generation are explained and linked. The literature review section is followed by the research methodology section, where the author describes the data collection, measurements, and instrument development process. Following that, the results and findings of the study are examined, which is followed by the discussion related to this study. The paper's final section is the conclusion section, including the study's limitations and potential future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over recent years, the research focus on service quality has received much interest. Prior literature has focused on the relevance of service quality in the quick-service restaurant context. Quality of service and price fairness impact customer satisfaction and word of mouth, both vital considerations for QSR success (e.g., Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2009). Studies have also examined the impact of customers' experience on customer satisfaction and word of mouth for different businesses (e.g., Ryu et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is evidence in the literature on how customer satisfaction influences consumers to engage in positive word of mouth (Oliver, 1996). Therefore, managers must not only understand the relevance of service quality and price fairness on the perception of consumers but also how this perception is influencing customer satisfaction and word of mouth behavior.

2.1 Constructs and Concepts

2.1.1 Service Quality Dimensions and Measures

The focus on the research stream related to perceived service quality has received much attention in developed countries (e.g., Fu & Parks, 2001; Furrer et al., 2000). However, recently, researchers have focused on this domain in emerging economies (e.g., Shahzadi et al., 2017). Parasuraman et al. (1988) substantially contributed to this research area by developing the 22-item SERVQUAL scale. In their study, Parasuraman et al. (1988) used the model to assess service quality by the difference between customers' expectations for the service to their perception of the actual service received across five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Although initially, Parasuraman et al. (1988) evaluated four different service providers using the SERVQUAL instrument, subsequent empirical studies have implemented this model in assessing service quality across a variety of businesses and industries (e.g., Fu & Parks, 2001; Furrer et al., 2000; Heung et al., 2000).

Despite the widespread use of the SERVQUAL framework across industries, empirical evidence supporting this instrument has shown mixed results. While Cronin and Taylor (1992) implied that perceptions could be used to assess service quality, Carman (1990) proposed that the SERVQUAL framework's specific dimensions could be modified, edited, or deleted for its applicability to particular service sectors.

Previous research on this framework's applicability to the restaurant industry was undertaken by Stevens (1995) and Andaleeb and Conway (2006) with positive results.

While Stevens (1995) designed a DINESERV framework from the SERVQUAL model, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) modified and deleted specific SERVQUAL framework dimensions with encouraging results. Therefore, the researcher decided to alter the model and investigate other relevant dimensions to the framework.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988, pp. 23), empathy is about providing individualized attention to customers. This dimension has greater applicability in businesses providing “high technical” advice and support. In quick-service restaurants, the server is busy attending to multiple customers, and consumers themselves wish to savor their food. In line with Andaleeb and Conway (2006), the researcher accepts that this dimension is not applicable in the quick-service restaurant setting. Parasuraman et al. (1988, pp. 23) explain the assurance dimension as the employees’ ability to inspire trust and confidence, which is more relevant to industries such as healthcare and legal services, where credence takes centerstage as there is a high risk of purchase. Similar to Andaleeb and Conway (2006), the researcher believes that this dimension is not applicable in the quick service restaurant setting.

Prior literature in the restaurant industry reveals the use of reliability/food quality, responsiveness/service quality, and atmospherics/tangibles/physical surroundings as the SERVQUAL model measures (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Mason et al., 2016; Ryu & Han, 2010; Shahzadi et al., 2018). At the same time, previous studies also suggest convenience as a vital metric regarding enhancing consumers’ perception of service quality and value (Gong & Yi, 2018). In a restaurant setting, convenience relates to consumers’ ease in purchasing meals (Hertz & Halkier, 2017). Therefore, the researcher believes service convenience is an essential dimension in measuring service quality in a restaurant setting, and thus, incorporates this dimension in the SERVQUAL framework. Therefore, the researcher proposes a modified SERVQUAL model having the dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, and convenience.

2.1.2 Price Fairness

According to Bolton et al. (2003), price fairness represents the fair and justified price consumers are willing to pay for any benefit. Malik et al. (2012) state that price is a critical factor in determining a service’s value to consumers. The competitive nature of the quick service restaurant means consumers consider internal reference prices, i.e., the price from a consumer’s memory serving as the basis for comparing actual prices (Grewal et al., 1998, p. 47). Therefore, the menu pricing can attract or repel consumers (Monroe, 1989). Thus, price fairness forms a key metric in analyzing customer behavior and perception in a QSR setting.

2.1.3 Customer Satisfaction

Managers focus on improving operational policies and marketing strategies to deliver customer satisfaction (Hsiao et al., 2016). Customer Satisfaction (CS) is a vital attribute in explaining an organization’s success in maintaining consumer relations and establishing repeat purchases (Barber et al., 2011). According to Oliver (1987),

customer satisfaction is the degree to which firms meet customer needs and demand. Prior studies reveal that several service dimensions- reliability/food quality, physical design/tangibles, responsiveness/interaction quality, and price/ perceived value are significant factors in influencing customers' satisfaction in a restaurant setting. (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Namkung & Jang, 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010).

2.1.4 Word of Mouth

According to Westbrook (1987), Word of Mouth (WOM) is the process of informal communication to others about the product/service after they have used it. This communication method is usually accepted to be more reliable, as it is consumer-generated and perceived to be independent of the firm's influence. According to Silverman (2001, pp. 20-26), consumers consistently converse about various products and services, making WOM a compelling and credible method of information dissemination. Although WOM can be either positive or negative, the researchers focused on the positive form of WOM as used in previous studies (e.g., Ahmadi, 2019). Marketers value positive word of mouth as it can influence consumer preference, choice in selecting services, and purchase decisions. (Wangenheim, 2005). Furthermore, Berry and Parasuraman (1991) assert that positive word of mouth is vital for a service provider's sustainability.

2.2 Hypotheses Development

2.2.1 The Influence of Service Quality

2.2.1.1 Reliability

Parasuraman et al. (1988, p. 23) defined reliability as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Andaleeb and Conway (2006) explain that for the restaurant industry, the reliability dimension is related to the aspects of food quality, such as whether the served food was fresh and of the right temperature. Furthermore, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) outline that this dimension has a significant impact on CS. While Ramanathan et al. (2016) state that perceived food quality is the most critical factor influencing customer satisfaction, Sulek and Hensley (2004) infer this dimension is a significant factor affecting CS and future WOM. In line with Sulek and Hensley (2004), Namkung and Jang (2007) state food quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. This dimension's widely accepted measures are food freshness, food taste, presentation, and smell.(Namkung & Jang, 2007; Ryu et al., 2012.; Sulek & Hensley, 2004).

Thus, the researcher proposes that this dimension positively impacts CS and WOM.

H1: The reliability dimension, i.e., food quality significantly influences customer satisfaction (CS)

H2: The reliability dimension, i.e., food quality significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

2.2.1.2 Responsiveness

Parasuraman et al. (1988, p. 23) defined responsiveness as the willingness to assist consumers and provide prompt services. According to Andaleeb and Conway (2006), the responsiveness/service quality dimension is a significant parameter in impacting customer satisfaction. Similar studies by Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Andaleeb and Conway (2006) proposed service quality as an antecedent of customer satisfaction and a significant factor impacting CS. Prior studies reveal responsiveness as a critical factor in determining word of mouth (Bloemer et al., 1999). For different service industries, we observe responsiveness not only having a significant influence on CS but also on WOM (e.g., Ahmadi, 2019; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Arasli et al., 2005).

Thus, the researcher proposes that this dimension positively impacts CS and WOM.

H3: The responsiveness dimension significantly influences customer satisfaction (CS)

H4: The responsiveness dimension significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

2.2.1.3 Tangibles

Parasuraman et al. (1988, p. 23) defined tangibles as the physical facilities and appearance of the personnel. Consumers relate this dimension to the service's physical presentation, which they use to evaluate service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Several studies observed that the physical environment (known as "atmospherics") is a crucial dimension in influencing customer's overall satisfaction (Ryu et al., 2007). In the restaurant industry context, Stevens et al. (1995) denoted the relevance of the physical environment on the service quality perception of customers. Bitner (1992) proposed that consumers react positively to servicescape elements such as temperature, décor, and other aesthetics. According to Barber et al. (2011), cleanliness factors play a significant role in influencing the consumer perspective of restaurant quality. Ryu and Jang (2007) state customers' responses are significantly influenced by the music, clean environment, and employee appearance in restaurants. Prior studies related to the restaurant industry reveal that this dimension affects CS and future behavioral intention, e.g., WOM (Jeong & Jang, 2018; Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Shahzadi, 2018).

Thus, the researcher proposes that this dimension positively impacts CS and WOM.

H5: The tangibles dimension significantly influences customer satisfaction (CS)

H6: The tangibles dimension significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

2.2.1.4 Convenience

Convenience is related to the level to which consumers desire to save time and energy while purchasing meals (Scholliers, 2015). The primary focus of the QSR setting is to provide a quick and convenient dining experience (Mason et al., 2013). According to Brandweek (1995), a critical target group for the QSR segment is the university-going individuals in the 18-24 age bracket. For an increasingly urban and young population such as Bangladesh's, the convenience factor could be a driving factor for QSRs to stand out. QSRs could differentiate by providing easy and convenient

solution to the target segment (Mason et al., 2013). Therefore, convenience is a driving force in influencing service quality perception and customer satisfaction level (Gong & Yi, 2018).

Service convenience deals with consumers' ability to achieve their purchase goals as quickly as possible (Chang et al., 2010). This dimension not only influences customer satisfaction (Gong & Yi, 2018) but also future behavioral intentions (Bellotti et al., 2015). In a similar vein, Wong and Zhao (2016) proposed that the convenience dimension plays a critical role in determining consumer satisfaction and future behavioral intentions.

Therefore, the researcher proposes that this dimension positively impacts CS and WOM.

H7: The convenience dimension significantly influences customer satisfaction (CS)

H8: The convenience dimension significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

2.2.2 The Influence of Price Fairness

According to Andaleeb and Conway (2006), price fairness is one of the determining influencers of customer satisfaction. Price fairness relates to the customers' evaluation of the utility derived from the service compared to the internal reference prices (Grewal et al., 1998). Cronin et al. (2000) found price fairness to be a critical predictor of consumers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the form of positive WOM. In line with this finding, while Gilbert et al. (2004) and Jalilvand et al. (2017) conclude that price fairness significantly affects CS, Ryu et al. (2007) and Shahzadi et al. (2018) highlight the relevance of this dimension in future behavioral intention.

Therefore, the researcher proposes that this dimension positively impacts CS and WOM.

H9: The price fairness dimension significantly influences customer satisfaction (CS)

H10: The price fairness dimension significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

2.2.3 The Influence of Customer Satisfaction

Prior studies reveal that customer satisfaction has a meaningful impact on consumers engaging in positive word of mouth about a company (Kim et al., 2009; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007). It has been observed that higher levels of CS lead to a greater extent in positive WOM generation (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Bitner, 1990). While previous research proposes that as customers' belief of being provided superior service enhances, so does their satisfaction levels (Nguyen et al., 2018; Ryu & Han, 2010), it also suggests a significant positive association between CS and future behavioral intentions such as WOM (Cronin et al., 2000; Olorunniwo et al., 2006). Furthermore, Ryu et al. (2008) studied CS's role as a mediating variable between service quality dimensions to future behavioral intentions. In a similar vein, Shahzadi et al. (2018), in their research, concluded the mediating impact between perceived service quality and behavioral choices.

Therefore, the researcher proposes that CS positively impacts WOM and acts as a mediator between the proposed service related dimensions and price fairness to WOM.

H11: The customer satisfaction dimension significantly influences word of mouth (WOM)

H12: The customer satisfaction dimension mediates the relationship between the proposed SERVQUAL dimensions, i.e., a) reliability, b) responsiveness, c) tangibles, and d) convenience and WOM.

H13: The customer satisfaction dimension mediates the relationship between the price fairness dimensions and WOM.

Thus, the researcher proposes that a conceptual research framework incorporating the association between different service dimension and price fairness on the consumers' satisfaction and the influence on word of mouth generation. (Figure 1).

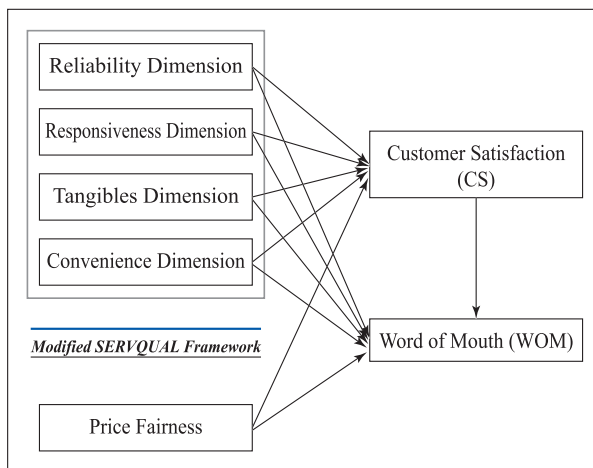


Figure 1 : Conceptual Research Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

For data collection, the author and volunteers, undergraduate students of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka, reached out to several QSRs in Banani and Dhanmondi, the hubs of QSRs in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to ask for permission to carry out surveys at these restaurants. Of these, seven QSRs granted permission to disseminate the questionnaire and conduct the study.

The researcher and volunteers collected data from the target customers visiting the seven chosen restaurants through a convenience sampling technique, a non-probability sampling technique, during two months (November 2020-December 2020). Previous studies related to this restaurant industry used this method to analyze and comprehend the relationship among proposed predictors, i.e., the modified dimensions of SERVQUAL model and price fairness, CS, and behavioral intentions such as WOM (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Shahzadi et al. 2018).

It is worth noting that the restaurant managers stated that although COVID-19 initially caused a significant negative impact on the QSRs, since September 2020, customers started coming back. Therefore, the researcher believes that the study's time frame, i.e., from November 2020 to December 2020, was justifiable to conduct the survey.

Initially, the researcher decided to conduct a pre-test to improve the measures' reliability with 100 responses. Once the questionnaire was refined, the volunteers distributed 540 questionnaires to customers visiting these restaurants, of which 460 were usable and was the final sample size. The researcher achieved a response rate of 85% of those who consented to participate in the survey, a response rate in the realms of desirable (Richardson, 2005). Furthermore, the sample size exceeded the acceptable sample size of 200 required for analyzing data with admissible statistical power (Hair et al., 2010).

3.2 Measurements and Methods

The conceptualized model posits the relationship among the predictors- modified SERVQUAL model and price fairness to customer satisfaction and WOM. In the questionnaire, there were four broad sections, which initially comprised of thirty-two items. The first three sections consisted of Likert scale items, and the last one consisted of questions about the frequency of visits to the selected restaurant and the demographics. The first section consisted of nineteen items, with sixteen of those linked to the modified SERVQUAL model and three items of price fairness. The researcher assessed food quality related attributes/reliability with five items from Namkung and Jang (2007) and Andaleeb and Conway (2006). For the service-related attributes/responsiveness, four items were adapted from Andaleeb and Conway (2006) and Ryu et al. (2012). To examine the tangibles construct/atmospherics, the researcher used four items from Andaleeb and Conway (2006) and Ryu and Jang (2007). The new construct of the modified SERVQUAL framework, convenience attribute, was analyzed using three items extracted from Berry et al. (2002). The final attribute of this section was price fairness comprising of three items from Andaleeb and Conway (2006) and Chen (2012). The researcher concentrated on using perceptual measures for the SERVQUAL measures as used in prior studies (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2009). This approach is consistent with other studies (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). While section 2 included four questions adapted from Ryu et al. (2012) and Aliman et al. (2016), section 3 borrowed three items from Savas et al. (2013). It is worth stating that the researcher made some minor alterations in the wording for some questions to align those to the QSRs context. These questions were rated on a five-point scale, from 1= "strongly disagree" to 5=" strongly agree."

3.3 Data Analysis and Tools

For analysis purposes, the author undertook an exploratory factor analysis with Promax rotation. Analysis of the modified SERVQUAL model's four dimensions and price fairness was initially undertaken together, followed by factor analysis

comprising the modified SERVQUAL model, price fairness, CS, and WOM. The acceptable factor loading for the study items was at least 0.60 (Hair et al., 2014), and items loading significantly in more than one factor, i.e., a value of .4 or above, were removed from consideration (Samuels, 2016). To test the hypotheses, the author conducted multiple regression analyses. Data were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS-25 software platforms at a 95% confidence level.

3.4 Scale Refinement

A pretest study was conducted on 100 customers to improve the measures' reliability. The questionnaire was modified to include reliable items, and the researcher also removed items that cross-loaded in more than one factor. Finally, from the pretest, four items were kept for the reliability construct, three from the responsiveness construct, and three from the tangibles construct. The items of the other dimensions-price fairness, customer satisfaction and WOM were retained with no alterations.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 details the demographic profile and the dining frequency of the survey respondents. In the sample, there was a pretty even representation of males (55%) and females (45%). Age-wise, the respondents ranged between 16 to 65 years, with the majority representation of young consumers, 72% of the respondents in the 18-24 age bracket. Further analysis revealed a significant portion of the respondents were students (70%), and we can observe a fair distribution of monthly household income across the different tiers.

Table 1 : Sample Profile

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
<18	40	9%
18-24	331	72%
24-30	44	10%
30-36	13	3%
36-42	15	3%
>42	17	3%
<i>Monthly Household Income</i>		
<Tk 75000	141	31%
Tk 75001-Tk.150000	166	36%
Tk.150001-Tk.225000	69	15%
Tk.225001-Tk.30000	45	10%
> Tk.300001	39	8%

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Occupation</i>		
Student	320	70%
Private sector employee	58	13%
Government/state official/employee	24	5%
Self-employed	48	10%
<i>Average Number of Visits</i>	10.5	
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	251	55%
Female	209	45%

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Primarily, prior to conducting the hypothesis testing, the author undertook an exploratory factor analysis and evaluated the internal consistency of the different measures using Cronbach's α coefficient. The α coefficients for tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness dimensions revealed scores between 0.63 and 0.74, which are acceptable reliability scores (Hulin et al., 2001). Furthermore, the α coefficients for convenience, price fairness, customer satisfaction, and WOM ranged from 0.8 to 0.9, reflecting excellent reliability levels (Hulin et al., 2001).

Multiple linear regression was used to perform hypothesis testing (Table-2). Furthermore, the four-stage approach posited by Baron and Kenny (1986) was utilized in conducting hypothesis testing to analyze the mediating effect of customer satisfaction between the predictors, i.e., the proposed SERVQUAL model and price fairness to WOM (Table 2). By looking into the variance inflation factor (VIF), which was within acceptable limits, the author concluded there were no multicollinearity issues (Pan & Jackson 2008).

From Model 1, the author assesses that the modified SERVQUAL model's different parameters- tangibles ($\beta=0.131$, p-value=0.012), reliability ($\beta=0.085$, p-value =0.045), responsiveness ($\beta=0.176$, p-value=.001) and convenience ($\beta=0.266$, p-value=0.001) have statistically significant positive association with WOM. However, the author finds no significant relationship between price fairness ($\beta=-0.010$, p-value =0.825) to WOM. From these assessments, while H2, H4, H6, and H8 are supported, hypothesis H10 is rejected. Model 2 reveals that dimensions of the modified SERVQUAL framework- tangibles ($\beta=0.194$, p-value =0.001), reliability ($\beta=0.084$ p-value =0.039), responsiveness ($\beta=0.22$, p-value=.001) and convenience ($\beta=0.104$, p-value=0.03) have statistically significant positive impact on customer satisfaction, thus, supporting H1, H3, H5 and H7. Analysis portrays no significant impact of price fairness ($\beta=-0.015$, p-value =0.727) on CS, providing no support for H9. Furthermore, using Model 3, the author explains that CS ($\beta=0.341$, p-value=0.0001) has a significant relationship with WOM, providing evidence supporting H11.

Using Model 4, the author explains the mediating effect of CS between the predictors, i.e., the modified SERVQUAL model parameters and price fairness and WOM. The results reveal that CS fully mediates the association between reliability ($\beta=0.040$, $p\text{-value} > 0.05$) and WOM. Analysis regarding the other parameter show that CS partially mediates the relationship between other SERVQUAL parameters, namely, reliability ($\beta=0.136$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$), tangibles ($\beta=0.096$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$), and convenience ($\beta=0.24$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$) and WOM. Overall, the author observes that CS ($\beta=0.185$, $p\text{-value} = 0.001$) partially mediates the relationship between the modified SERVQUAL parameters and WOM. Thus, the author states there is support to the claims in hypothesis H12a, b, c, and d. Regarding H13, as there is no significant relationship between price fairness and WOM, as well as between this predictor and CS, the general notion is that the mediation between price fairness and WOM through CS is not likely to occur, thus providing no support for H13.

Table 2 : Hypothesis Testing

Parameters	Model 1: PV-DV		Model 2: PV-MV		Model 3: MV-DV		Model 4: PV+MV-DV	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Tangibles	0.131	0.012	0.194	0.001			0.096	0.035
Reliability	0.085	0.045	0.084	0.039			0.040	0.102
Responsiveness	0.176	0.001	0.220	0.001			0.136	0.006
Convenience	0.266	0.001	0.104	0.032			0.244	0.001
Price fairness	-0.010	0.825	-0.015	0.727				
Customer Satisfaction					0.341	0.001	0.185	0.001
Significance F	0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001	
Additional Remarks- PV- predictor variables, MV- mediating variable & DV- dependent variable Model 1: Impact of the predictors on WOM Model 2: Impact of the predictors on the mediating variable, CS Model 3: Impact of the mediating variable, CS on WOM Model 4: Impact of the predictors and mediating variable, CS on WOM								

5. DISCUSSION

This study develops a modified SERVQUAL framework in the context of QSRs and analyzes the association of parameters in the proposed SERVQUAL model and price fairness to customer satisfaction and word of mouth generation. The attributes of the modified SERVQUAL model were- tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and convenience. The results corroborate the inclusion of the convenience dimension in the proposed SERVQUAL model for the QSR industry. This is in line with prior studies that substantiate the necessity for industry-based modification of the SERVQUAL model (Carman, 1990; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2008).

The study results illustrate that the modified SERVQUAL model's dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, and convenience significantly influence customer satisfaction. The impact of reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles on CS is consistent with prior studies (Jalilvand et al, 2017; Qin & Prybutok, 2008; Shahzadi et al., 2018). Furthermore, the effect of convenience in impacting CS is in line with the study by Richardson et al. (2019). The study also reveals that these dimensions impact WOM. Previous research by Richardson et al. (2019) also indicates that reliability, responsiveness, and convenience influence consumers' willingness to recommend QSRs. Price fairness, the other parameter of interest in this study, shows no significant relationship to CS and WOM. Although this revelation is in line with that of Qin and Prybutok (2008), it is inconsistent with the finding of Andaleeb and Conway (2006). The author believes that this parameter is comparable and similar among the quick service restaurants chosen in this study. Therefore, price fairness does not exhibit a significant impact on CS and WOM in the QSR setting.

Similar to the proposition of Jalilvand et al. (2014), the author asserts there is a positive relationship between CS and WOM; the results also signify that satisfaction mediates the association between the modified SERVQUAL attributes and WOM. This claim is in line with prior studies by Ryu et al. (2008) and Shahzadi et al. (2018).

This study advances our knowledge regarding the SERVQUAL model by modifying the framework by introducing the convenience parameter. To add to this, customer satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between the proposed SERVQUAL parameters and WOM. Furthermore, in line with previous studies, food quality/reliability, service quality/responsiveness, tangibles/atmospherics, convenience, and CS are critical predictors of WOM. The research not only introduces but also portrays the significant impact of the convenience parameter in influencing customer satisfaction and WOM.

6. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

With QSRs being ubiquitous across the globe, emerging nations are experiencing significant growth in this segment. Although the QSR industry's size is rapidly increasing in Bangladesh, however, due to the competitive pressure, it is crucial for managers in QSR setting to understand the parameters that significantly impact customer satisfaction and their willingness to recommend the QSR. This study sheds light on the topic by examining the relationship among the relevant parameters using a modified SERVQUAL model to CS and WOM in the QSR setting.

The author acknowledges the potential limitations of the study. The study results are based on the analysis of respondents from seven QSR outlets in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Although consumers dining at QSRs are relatively homogeneous, reaching out to a broader consumer base in other QSRs in Dhaka and other cities would be desirable for generalizing the findings. Furthermore, although the study analyzes four dimensions related to service quality, the author believes incorporation of other attributes could improve the model's robustness. Also, it would be interesting

to investigate the service quality attributes for QSRs across different nations. With global QSRs attempting to expand their business in emerging nations, comparing the service quality attributes across countries could be a worthwhile research avenue. To add to these, the inclusion of consumer demographics and relationship characteristics such as duration of visit and visit frequency and analyzing the impact of these factors on CS and WOM generation could lead to new research scope.

Practical Implications

The study has significant managerial implications for QSR managers to focus on service strategy and quality parameters, leading to increased customer satisfaction and building WOM. The research reveals restaurant managers should focus on reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, and convenience as differentiating factors to impact CS and WOM. These findings can help in developing strategies and policies to build customer satisfaction and retention.

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APPENDIX

Table : Measure of Attributes

Tangibles *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.63$*

The dining areas looked thoroughly clean.

Employees were neat and well-dressed.

Lighting in the restaurant was appropriate.

Responsiveness *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$*

Employees provided prompt and quick service.

Employees were always willing to help me.

Employees made me feel comfortable in dealing with them.

Reliability *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$*

The food was delicious.

The restaurant offered a variety of menu items.

The smell of the food was enticing.

The food presentation was visually attractive.

Convenience *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$*

I am able to get to the restaurant quickly and easily

This location is convenient for me.

The location is accessible for me.

Price Fairness *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$*

I believe this restaurant was fairly priced.

I did not pay more than I planned.

I did not find the food items to be more expensive than what I expected.

Customer Satisfaction *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$*

I felt happy with my experience at the restaurant.

I was very satisfied with my overall experience at this restaurant.

Overall, this restaurant put me in a good mood.

Word of Mouth *Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$*

I say positive things about the restaurant to those around me

I encourage those around me to visit this restaurant.

I recommend the restaurant to other people.