

# Impact of Different Factors in Creation of Word of Mouth at Hospitality Industry

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## Abstract

Few empirical studies have been conducted to explore what motivates and demotivates customers to engage in word of mouth (WOM) activities in the restaurant industry. This research paper inspects the connection between different attributes of hospitality industry which lead to the creation of word of mouth. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect. 200 respondents from one of the leading and famous university of Pakistan is used as a sample to study on. To test the proposed model, we use structural equation modelling. The research ended with two major findings. First, food quality and service quality have great impact on creation of WOM. Second, price and atmosphere does not have any impact in creation of word of mouth.

**Keywords:** Word of mouth; Restaurant industry; Customer preferences; Restaurant experience

## Introduction

When we talk about restaurant business we mean that the commercial place where customers are served with food. Restaurant plays vital role in the social life of people and developing other businesses. People use to go to the restaurant with their friends and family members. Most of the business meetings are also held at restaurants. Restaurant business is one of the evergreen businesses in Pakistan. The quickly made food (fast food) has made this industry more profitable and attractive to investors, as day by day likeness of these types of food items is increasing among consumers.

According to Department of Economics and Agriculture's Research Service of USA, Pakistani people consume 47.7% of their income on food which is increasing 10% annually. On an average calculation, it is said that Pakistan's Restaurant industry is growing by 20% annually, making this business more attractive. "A study on fast food consumption trends in Pakistan published in the European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science; Issue 48 (2012) states that 89% people indicated a preference for fast food over fine dining or cooking at home."

WOM is a form of communication which involves consumers discussing their experience after their service consumption [1]. It is now the most vital communication strategy to promote product and brands [2]. Word of mouth is straight forward communication of two non-commercial people who talks about any business without putting any favour for it [3]. WOM is commonly viewed as more reliable than advertisements and any other mode of communication [4]. Former research shows that there are more chances of spreading WOM by customers about things with which they are closely connected [5-8]. In hospitality industry the influence of WOM is particularly strong as the quality of services is often unidentified prior to consumption (Zhang et al., 2014). Generally, researchers are agreed that food, environment, service and price are the factors which create substantial impact on dining experience at restaurant. Yet, very few attempts have been made to find out impact of these factors in creation of WOM at restaurant industry.

There are several factors which have been studied by different scholars that consumer considers before relying on information given by anyone. Some famous factors like source similarity, source expertise, and source credibility etc. are well known. Credibility of

the sender is also important factor which influence to the customer while purchasing any product or service. WOM is considered to be more accurate and reliable while making purchasing decision about any product or service. The study by McKinsey showed that 20-50% of consumers consider WOM basic factor to decide for any product or service [9]. Numerous studies have found different factors leading a consumer to spread either positive or negative WOM. But no one has researched the impact of different factors in the creation of WOM at restaurant industry. So the primary objective of our research is to find out the relationship of each factor which influences the consumers in creation of WOM (positive or negative). We have chosen restaurant industry as our target area as it is positively growing, getting more consumer intentions and comes in the category of services.

According to Keller and Fay [10], on average, 2.4 billion daily conversations involve a brand which lead marketers to know consumer WOM patterns [11,12]. According to Keller and Libai word of mouth creates great impact on consumer behaviour [13]. "It generates 3.3 billion brand impressions each day, and shapes everything from the movies consumers watch to the websites they visit" [14-16]. A study by Trusov et al. states that "word of mouth is the primary factor behind 20 to 50% of all purchasing decisions...and...generates more than twice the sales of paid advertising"[16].

Services are of intangible nature which cannot be evaluated before we experience them. So purchasing them led to a customer on high risk and make them more reliant on on interpersonal effect of WOM [17]. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study the power of WOM in the restaurant industry. Instead of significant impact of WOM in service sector, especially in restaurant industry, little research has been conducted in this area. Moreover, no research has been devoted to find out what motivates or discourages customers to engage in WOM and

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which factors of restaurant experience are more inclined to spread WOM. Further, customers' motivations for disseminating WOM have not been studied. Becoming aware about the motivations behind spreading of positive word of mouth is particularly significant because it may increase customers' willingness to purchase, as it reduces the risk involved in the purchase [18]. Understanding these motivations will also be helpful for corporate sectors so that they work on the factors which lead towards positive word of mouth. According to a study done by Arndt and Sundaram et al. positive WOM can reduce the promotional expenditure as it can create favourable image of the company and its brands [19,20]. On other hand negative WOM will lead on the way to less buying from new customers [19], abridged administrative capability to hold customers, ruined organizational status [21,22], and damaged brand equity [23]. Looking at the essential part that NWOM has in disturbing organizations' status, it becomes necessary for service sellers to be aware of operative policies to reduce NWOM behaviour [24].

Investigating WOM at the discussion level is also significant to brand managers as it offers more accurate insights into which kinds of WOM talks are most strongly linked with managerially-desired consumer oriented results [25]. So understanding factors behind creation of WOM may help managers to reorganize their outlets in a way which is liked by customers leading in increase of more foot falls. Finally, identifying the sources of WOM would be helpful for managers and owners of restaurants to improve their restaurants according to customers' likeness. Thus, the main objectives of this study were to: (1) recommend a hypothetical model which stresses on the relationships between restaurant experience and the inspiration to spread WOM. (2) Empirically study which restaurant experiences cause customers to involve in WOM, and (3) examine the intensity of each factor involved in the creation of WOM.

## Literature Review

Word of mouth plays an enormous role in diffusion of the information about product/service.

Arndt examined the trend of purposing product or service is generally due to the WOM communication about the product and service and person are changing their buying behaviour by positive or negative WOM [26]. Researcher interviewed from those who has purchased new food products and concluded that those who purchase new products are more likely influenced by favourable WOM.

Herr, Kardes, and Kim explored the convincing effect of WOM. Similarly Bone investigated WOM communication through involving participants in listening audiotape after listening it, researcher gets comments either from respondents (favourable or unfavourable) [27,28].

The attributes like price, quality food, quality service, environment and taste are considered as assets by the restaurant industries in the Pakistan and people of Pakistan are keen to spend additional for these features. Above factors strongly influence to create word of mouth.

## Word of mouth (WOM)

Word of mouth is an unpaid advertisement in which respondents shares their experience about product or service (favourably or unfavourably). Unfavourable WOM communication may ruin the company on other hand positive WOM communication may takes the company to be a leader in its market segment. The people who have more knowledge or opinion leader will influence more to change their

buying behaviour of customers when they spread word of mouth about any product and service.

Henning-Thurau et al. defines word of mouth as any comments (positive or negative) received or spread by the actual, former or potential customer about any product or service [29,30]. Word of mouth is the process in which people shares their experience and views about any particular product (brand) or service which influence on consumer's buying behaviour [30,31].

It is analysed from literature review that price, environment, service quality and taste are used as independent variable [26,29,30,32,33].

## Price

There are always different perceptions of customers about price. High price may be perceived that firm is providing high quality so if company reduce its price these customers may change their buying behaviour. Low price may also be perceived as low quality sometimes perceived as low quality so pricing setting is much difficult task for the companies. Low price may also be perceived as low quality sometimes perceived as low quality so pricing setting is much difficult task for the companies (Philip Kotler 14th edition).

Price is taking part in an important role within the customer's satisfaction as the result of the price of product or service charged affect directly on the customer, therefore if it's reasonable then it influences to create positive word of mouth about restaurant and make consumers willing to visit more in the future [34]. Therefore companies must set the prices carefully to get customers loyalty.

Price is the element which influences the people to create word of mouth for the restaurant. If people get fair price, it will satisfy them and they will go to that restaurant again. Price of the product may build or down the product quality. Fair price will lead customer to visit restaurant frequently and spread positive word of mouth that is beneficial for restaurants. If consumers perceived that restaurant is charging high price that will harm the reputation [35].

## Service quality

Employees have direct relation with customer with service. An employee has limited time with customer because service is the factor which cannot be stored so within specified time employee has to make customer happy with quality services.

Service quality affects the consumer intention towards positive or negative word of mouth has observed by Kim et al. in their studies [35-37]. DINSERV technique is used to measure the service quality in restaurant industry. DINESERV is based on five dimensions which are reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles, consistency and empathy.

For long term relationship it is necessary to provide standard quality service to satisfy the customers Service quality will impact the clients to create word of mouth [38]. Customers will pay good price for the quality service [30].

Service quality is the factor which plays crucial role in making organization profitable because it is directly related to the customers [39,40].

## Food quality

Taste is the basic factor which force to the customers in select best restaurant. Most of the time Pakistani people differentiate restaurants on the basis of their taste. Before selecting any restaurant most of the

people ask about the taste of the products of that particular restaurant [41].

The attributes of food quality are freshness, taste and presentation. Food quality was measured by on above attributes [36].

Namkung and Jang measured food quality through food presentation, menu variety, healthy options, food taste, food freshness, and food temperature as attributes to investigate the importance of food quality in restaurant business [42].

Liu and Jang conducted research on Chinese restaurant and found out the same conclusion which was concluded by previous authors [35]. Liu and Jang added food safety and menu variety, to their study [35].

### Atmosphere

Atmosphere is all about the surrounding of the restaurant which creates an image into the mind of consumer and consumer's perceived value which affects the buying behaviour of the customers.

Due to growing literacy rate and growth in income, branded and well decorated restaurants are going to be more favoured by the customers [41]. Environment of the restaurant influences to satisfy the customer (Lim, 2010) which leads to create word of mouth [42].

Ryu et al. suggested the model to measure customer's perception called DINESCAPE [43]. It includes only internal aspects and excluded the external aspects like (parking area and design) and non-dinning environment like (waiting area and restrooms).

Liu and Jang conducted research on Chinese restaurant by using DINESCAPE's items used to compute the atmosphere of restaurants and they concluded that environment having significant relationship with satisfaction with restaurant [35].

### Research Framework

Research frame work has been taken from the research paper of Jeong and Jang [30]. We have modified to see directly impact of different factors on word of mouth. Jeong conducted on eWOM whereas this research is conducted to see the impact of traditional word of mouth. To measure the word of mouth has used three dimensions: concerns for others, helping others and express feelings (Figure 1) [30].

### Research hypothesis

As per our research we want to see the relationship of different factors on creation of word of mouth. Followings hypothesis are made.

H1: Atmosphere of the restaurant has significant impact on creation of word of mouth.

H2: Price of the food items has significant impact on creation of word of mouth.

H3: Service Quality of employees has significant impact on creation of word of mouth.

H4: Food Quality of the restaurant has significant impact on creation of word of mouth.

### Data Collection

Our questionnaire is taken from Jeong and Jang [30]. The questionnaire survey was distributed among students and employees of Pakistan. The data was gathered from various positions of Sukkur Institute of Business Administration University: students, lecturers, assistant professors, and other employees.

Total 230 responses were collected 21 responses excluded due to incomplete filling of questionnaires and 9 responses were excluded because they choose that they never go to the restaurant (in screening phase) so a total of 200 responses were included for research analyses.

In 200 responses, (74.5%) were students and (25.5%) were employees. We have 57.5% of male in our responses and 42.5% of females. We made the four segments 15 to 25, 26 to 35, 36 to 45 and above 45. (80%) responses were those who lie between 15 to 25 age, (17%) responses were those who come under the 26 to 35 age, (1.5%) responses come lie in 36 to 45 segment of age, and (1.5%) responses lie in above 45 age. In our sample (88.5%) responses are single and (11.5%) responses were married. In education we made three segments "college", "undergraduate" and "postgraduate". (7.0%) responses were taken from college, (59.5%) responses were studied in undergraduate program, and (33.5%) responses were studied in postgraduate's program.

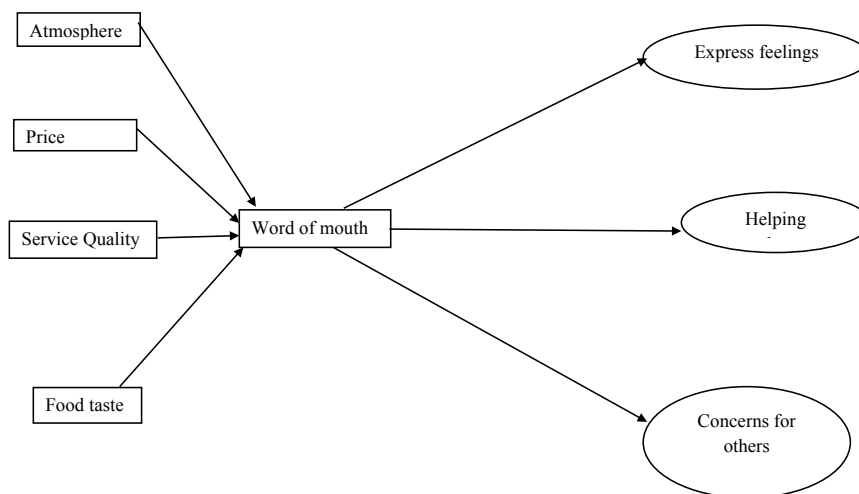


Figure 1: Research hypothesis.

## Analysis and Results

Partial least squares (PLS) approach through the Smart PLS 2.0 software was used to analyse and study the collected data [44]. Components-based structural equation modelling (SEM) such as PLS is speedily becoming a widely-used substitute to covariance-based SEM. As it demands fewer sample size and can run several regressions at a time. Data was analysed through a two-step analysis approach as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing whereby at first data was examined on measurement model and then on structural model as shown below [45]. In addition, to compute significance levels for loadings, weights and path coefficients the bootstrapping method (200 resamples) was used [46].

### Measurement model

Measurement model is used to address the relationships between the latent variables and their (item) indicators. Before assessing the structural model for hypothesis testing, we would check construct validity through measurement model. Construct validity is comprising of two approaches, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity. Sufficient convergent and discriminant validity is needed by the items demonstrate as a condition for establishing construct validity. According to Hair et al. to assess convergent validity factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) are used [47]. Table 1 lists the reliabilities, AVE and indicator loadings/weights, for all the items listed in the model. Figure 2 shows the model in PLS software.

The loadings of all items met the benchmark of 0.5 as recommended by Hair et al. [47]. The composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded the benchmark value of 0.70 as recommended by Hair et al. while the AVEs for each construct also exceeded the benchmark value of 0.50 as suggested by Fornell and Larcker [48]. Cronbach alpha value also met the criteria of 0.7 as recommended [49]. In short, convergent validity was verified without deleting any item.

To measure, measurement model the next approach is Discriminant Validity. Discriminant validity is measured whether different constructs differ from each other. And it is checked by comparing the the square root of the AVE and the correlations between constructs [48]. Below Table 2 shows that the research has met the criteria of Discriminant Validity [48,50].

### Structural model

After the analysing of measurement model the next analyses lies on structural model. We use structural model to find out relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables in the model. Table 3 shows the results for the structural model. Although Price and Atmosphere was found to be not significantly-related to WOM, so in a summarized way, H1 and H2 were not supported, while H3 and H4 were supported.

To further analyze our research through Structural Model, another

Construct	Item	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha	AVE
Concern for others			0.824311	0.680425	0.610035
WOM1_1	Reflective	0.781			
WOM1_2	Reflective	0.796			
WOM1_3	Reflective	0.766			
Express Feelings			0.826461	0.68319	0.617593
WOM2_1	Reflective	0.843			
WOM2_2	Reflective	0.86			
WOM2_3	Reflective	0.684			
Helping the Restaurant			0.7992	0.625463	0.571968
WOM3_1	Reflective	0.839			
WOM3_2	Reflective	0.684			
WOM3_3	Reflective	0.738			
Atmosphere			0.859966	0.799481	0.551784
Atmosphere_1	Reflective	0.762			
Atmosphere_2	Reflective	0.76			
Atmosphere_3	Reflective	0.671			
Atmosphere_4	Reflective	0.755			
Atmosphere_5	Reflective	0.761			
Price			0.858975	0.678195	0.753202
Price_1	Reflective	0.907			
Price_2	Reflective	0.827			
Service quality			0.813255	0.691044	0.523861
Servicequality_1	Reflective	0.752			
Servicequality_2	Reflective	0.772			
Servicequality_3	Reflective	0.592			
Servicequality_4	Reflective	0.764			
Taste			0.878387	0.828745	0.591176
Taste_1	Reflective	0.729			
Taste_2	Reflective	0.769			
Taste_3	Reflective	0.796			
Taste_4	Reflective	0.777			
Taste_5	Reflective	0.762			

**Table 1:** Lists the reliabilities, AVE and indicator loadings/weights.

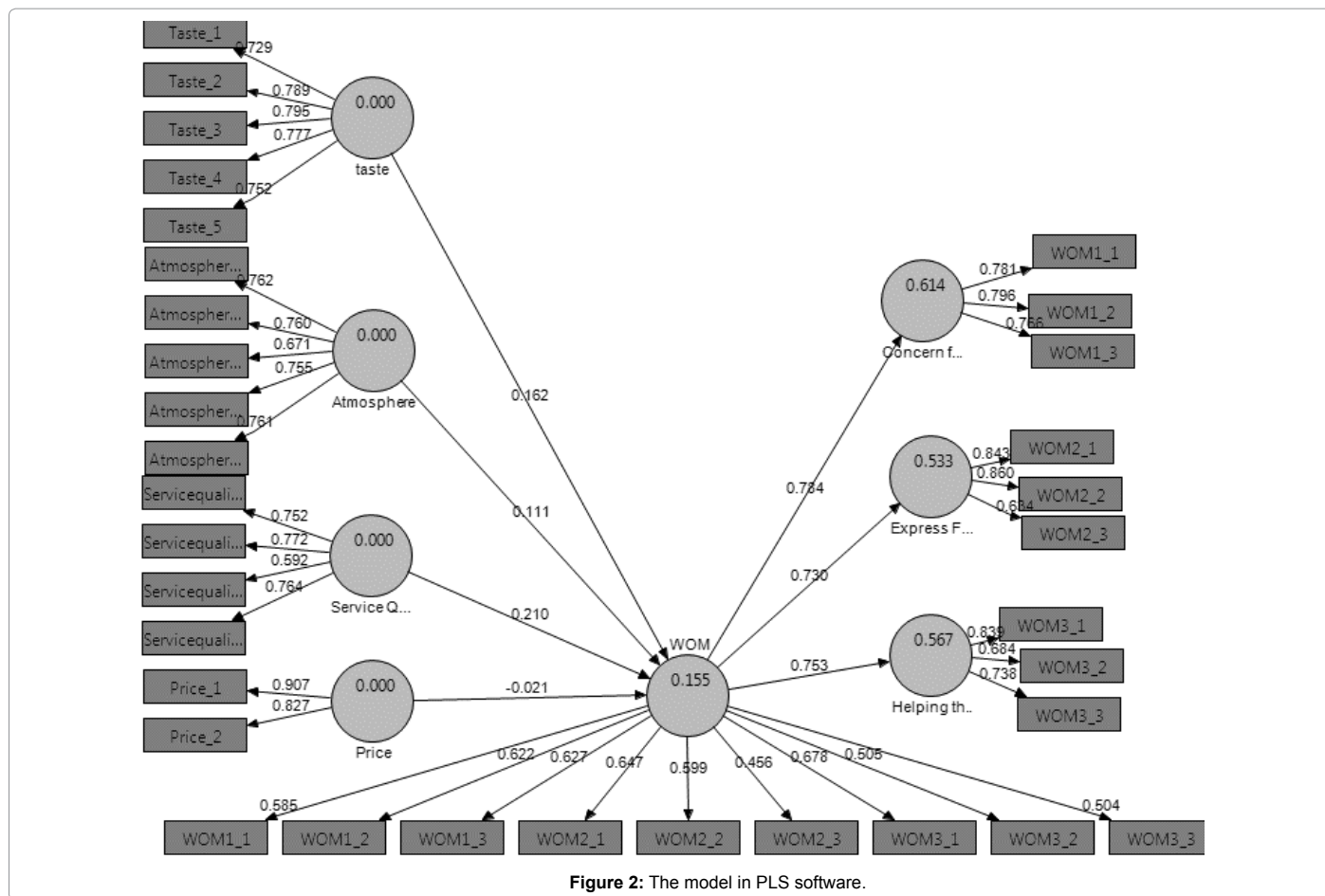


Figure 2: The model in PLS software.

	Atmosphere	Concern for others	Express Feelings	Helping the restaurant	Price	Service Quality	Taste
Atmosphere	0.742821648						
Concern for others	0.22287	0.781047					
Express Feelings	0.1978	0.343055	0.78587085				
Helping the restaurant	0.273212	0.407315	0.31983	0.7562857			
Price	0.566638	0.106975	0.157573	0.25873	0.8678721		
Service Quality	0.602889	0.230756	0.260339	0.304354	0.548588	0.72378243	
Taste	0.504561	0.216874	0.25558	0.251902	0.445003	0.528905	0.7688797

Table 2: The criteria of discriminant validity.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	Decision
H1	Atmosphere → WOM	0.111125	0.080748	1.376195*	Not Supported
H2	Price → WOM	-0.021391	0.10375	0.206183*	Not Supported
H3	Service Quality → WOM	0.209956	0.084244	2.492243**	Supported
H4	Taste → WOM	0.161864	0.082815	1.954515**	Supported

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01.

Table 3: Structural models.

approach is Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) which checks whether our model is predicting what we are going to test. The results are shown in Table 4 shows that there is a predictive relevance [51].

### Discussion and Conclusion

The impact of different factors creating Word of Mouth in hospitality industry is important as inexperienced customers try to increase their knowledge of physical factors and attempt to decrease

	1-SSE/SSO
Atmosphere	0.552185
Concern for others	0.051205
Express Feelings	0.061455
Helping the restaurant	0.066736
Price	0.748924
Service Quality	0.526299
Taste	0.59016

Table 4: Predictive relevance.

their risk regarding intangibles [30]. Decision to choose any particular restaurant may lead towards significant risk, which mostly, in the end lead customers to become reliant on the impact of WOM. Furthermore, the influence of positive WOM in hospitality industry is substantial as it is likely to support the restaurant in building a positive image and finally, increasing customers' intentions to purchase. While Negative WOM works in opposite by creating negative image of the restaurant hence leading to decreased customers' intention to purchase. Thus restaurant managers should know the factors creating WOM.

At the end, we conclude that customers are influence to spread WOM by restaurant experiences with excellent Food as well as Services. Food experiences inspire customers to spread WOM to create awareness for inexperienced customers, since superior food quality and Service Quality is important for customers to talk about. Results support work [42], which discovered that food appearances and taste has strong relationship with customer satisfaction and behaviour intents. So restaurant supervisors should ensure that they offer good food presentation and taste with different varieties (food menu).

As our results showed, Service Quality is the most important factor in creating WOM. Therefore Managers should also ensure consistent, dependable, quick and friendly services with the knowledge about services offered. For this supervisors should devote maximum energy and resources in training and developing the employees. All employees who provides services e.g. host/hostess, cashier, servers and other service employees should be able to understand customers need and provide uniform and best quality service to customers [30]. This finding validate the work of Sundaram et al. [19], who concluded that consumers take active part to support restaurants based on pleasing workers' behaviour. The results also validated the research of(Ladhari, 2008), who concluded that service excellence is affected by buyers' gratification in terms of both good and bad feelings, which give rise to customers' inspiration on post-dining behaviours.

Knowing about the economic conditions of Pakistan we expected that Price would have strong influence on creating WOM but it worked in opposite. This finding validates the work done by Jeong and Jang et al. who concluded that price is not driven factor for the satisfaction of restaurant's customers [30,52]. Iglesias and Guillen also mentioned that "the total price of a restaurant affects the phase when customers choose among all the restaurants consider alternatives, but once assumed, it does not subsequently affect customers' satisfaction after the service has been experienced." So it is clear from the statement that customer view price as factor to choose the restaurant therefore a manager must not ignore this factor as well. The theory of customer's value explains, "Buyers' perceptions of value represent a trade-off between the quality or benefits they perceive in the product relative to the sacrifice they perceive by paying the price". Due to continuous changing of layouts and environment of restaurants we also expect that Atmosphere would also have significant effect on creating WOM [53]. In future, due to changing customer preferences this factor might get deep consideration by customers and as well as managers.

#### Future areas

As this research is done in Pakistan the same research can be done in any other area of world having different consumer behaviours. The same research can be done in any other industry like Automobile, Travel and Tours etc. As there are just 4 factors are used to analyse in future more variables can also be used.

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