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UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER EXIT BEHAVIOUR: THE MODERATED MEDIATION ROLE OF SATISFACTION AND BARRIERS IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

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Abstract: *The present research attempts to demonstrate how customers decide to switch from one casual dining restaurant to another, using the pull-push-mooring theoretical framework. Push factors, such as poor food quality and low satisfaction levels serve as the primary drivers prompting customers to switch. The pull variables include switching motives such as availability of attractive alternatives that encourages customers to switch to competing restaurants. The elements that determine the stability of the mooring variables such as switching barriers have a significant moderating impact. The study employs structural equation modelling (SEM) based on data collected from 563 adult respondents within the National Capital Region (NCR) of India to validate the casual relationship and the strength of the relationships between food-related attributes, customer satisfaction, and switching barriers and switching motives on the switching intention of customers at casual dining restaurants. The findings offer practical implications for restaurant managers, enabling them to design targeted strategies aimed at reducing customer churn, enhancing satisfaction, and fostering long-term loyalty.*

Keywords: *Switching Intention, Food-Related Attributes, Switching Barriers, Switching Motives, Customer Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of dining out has recently become a lifestyle trend, leading to significant expansion and rivalry within the organised sector of the Indian restaurant industry. Restaurants can be considered as a hybrid model of production and service provision, as they fulfil the role of service providers by attending to the customers' needs and generating meals as a producer. Despite geographic, national, and cultural restrictions, the restaurant industry continues to develop significantly due to changes in consumer lifestyles, increased household earnings, and preferences for more convenient food options. With increased consumption of outside meals, maintaining a loyal customer base for the restaurants has become a critical challenge. High customer churn is a significant challenge for the restaurant industry. Customer switching disrupts the relationship between the business organisation and its customers (Krishnan & Raghuram, 2024). When consumers switch, it negatively impacts businesses' profitability and future earnings (Moon et al., 2022). The importance of retaining customers has grown as dining establishments compete fiercely with one other. Various researchers have claimed that rather than striving to attract new clients, retention of the most valued current ones should be given top priority as acquiring new ones is getting more difficult and costly. Restaurants endeavour to enhance client retention by delivering an exceptional dining experience.

Nowadays customers are demanding as they not only expect a diverse and unique menu at a reasonable price, but also a great experience in a physical environment. The vital aim of a restaurant is to earn profit by offering excellent services, thereby satisfying the expectations of the customers (Kocoglu & Kalem, 2020). Customer-centric restaurants assess customer demands and strive to meet them in a manner that enhances satisfaction and fosters long-term patron retention. The loss of potential revenue and the expense of obtaining new clients occur when customers transition from one service provider to another (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2023), a phenomenon referred to as customer switching behaviour. Customer switching endangers the long-term involvement

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between the organisation and the customers. This behaviour significantly impacts the profitability as well as market share of the service organisation (Batmunkh, 2025). The result of satisfied customers is customer loyalty, which provides a competitive advantage to the business organisation. The restaurants should work on finding out reasons that give rise to customers switching to other restaurants and try to minimise their switching rate.

To succeed in retaining present customers and attracting new ones, it is crucial to comprehend the factors that lead customers to switch. Only then can restaurant managers develop strategies to keep their customer base. This research contributes to the literature by (1) examining the effect of food-related attributes and customer satisfaction on the intention to switch, (2) explaining the impact of presence of switching barriers and switching motives, and (3) providing practical implications for restaurant managers. The following sections will discuss the literature, followed by research methodology, results, and conclusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Model

The phenomenon of customer switching may be observed through the push, pull, and mooring effects (Bansal et al., 2005; Haridasan et al., 2021). The foundation of this paradigm is established by studies of human migration (Lin & Wu, 2021). The push effect occurs when customers shift to a new service provider due to dissatisfaction or low level of service with their existing service provider (Timur et al., 2025). Lisana (2023) asserts that the push impact enhances the intention to switch.

A pull factor refers to a favourable characteristic of alternative services that attracts customers and encourages them to switch to those services (Guo et al., 2021). It has a favourable impact on the inclination to replace (Widodo et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2021; Leong, 2022). The pull effect is influenced by the favourable aspects of the service system, such as the usability of alternatives and superiority of the product or service being offered.

Mooring variables play a role in switching behaviour, either facilitating or inhibiting the decision to switch. The mooring effect, as described in migration literature, refers to the influence of personal and social factors on the intention to switch (Lisana, 2023). Costs associated with switching are instances of mooring elements that either enable or impede consumers' transition to alternative options (Chang et al., 2017). Furthermore, situational, social, cultural, and personal mooring factors may facilitate or impede altering decisions (Yu et al., 2017). The mooring effect significantly impacts the willingness of customers to switch to alternative services (Ye et al., 2022). When there is strong mooring effect, consumers are unlikely to switch even if the alternative attractiveness is high (Matondang et al., 2019). This particular factor maintains consumers in a fixed position, notwithstanding the influence of push, pull, and mooring variables. Various researchers have applied the PPM model in different industries.

Current research attempts to fill the significant gap in the literature by figuring out the impact of push, pull, and mooring factors on casual dining restaurant customers who have the desire to switch to other restaurants. The study included the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator between the food-related attributes and switching intention. Furthermore, the moderating role of switching barriers has also been studied. The identification of these important attributes is crucial for strategy formulation by the casual dining restaurant managers to reduce the level of switching.

Switching Intention

Switching is a negative response by the customers towards a business organisation. A customer decides to go elsewhere for their service needs and they are likely to start a fresh relationship with another service provider (Huang & Hsiesh, 2012; Nikbin et al., 2012). Switching intention denotes the probability that a consumer will move from their current service or product provider to an alternative one (Bansal et al., 2005). Expressing an intention to switch suggests a likely transition from one service provider to another (Han & Hyun, 2013; Chang et al., 2017; Astuti & Eliana, 2019). It is a relationship ending process. The probability or certainty of a consumer switching from one service or product provider to another is known as their switching intention. This denotes the complete or partial termination of the customer's association with the current service provider. Partial switching enables consumers to retain their current associations with the organisation at the time of accepting new patterns of behaviour.

According to Pimenta (2022), when customers are unhappy with the inadequate level of service performance, they intend to switch. When the outcome falls short of expectations, dissatisfaction sets in, and dissatisfaction leads to the desire to change providers. This implies that when the level of service provided to customers falls significantly short of their expectations, it will result in discontent and a desire to move to an alternative. In addition, customer satisfaction and the wide range of accessible alternatives serve as inducement for consumers to move to alternative services (Jabeen et al., 2015).

Food-Related Attributes

In the restaurant industry, nothing matters more than the food quality (Ramanathan et al., 2016; Kukanja et al., 2020). The food is what lures the customers back to a restaurant (Hanaysha, 2016; Kukanja et al., 2020). The primary factor that influences customers to revisit a restaurant is the quality of the food (Sharma et al., 2021). If a restaurant fails to deliver quality meals, any focus on enhancement of the performance becomes inconsequential (Carranza et al., 2018). Presentation, healthfulness, flavour, freshness, and temperature are the aspects of food that matter. According to Abdullah et al. (2018), food quality depends on taste and preparation. Food-related attributes are a crucial part of customer satisfaction in the restaurant sector (Haghighi et al., 2012; Abdullah et al., 2023).

The cuisine is the most important factor when choosing a restaurant, and there is a significant association between customer satisfaction and food (Ozdemir et al., 2015). Ha and Jang (2013) discovered a positive correlation between food quality and customer satisfaction as well as behavioural intentions. Prayag et al. (2015) discovered a positive relationship between food attributes and behaviour in the casual dining restaurants. Customers' decision to remain at a restaurant is contingent upon their satisfaction with the food's quality. Conversely, if they are disappointed, they will opt to patronise a different establishment. Customers are more likely to patronise a restaurant if they are content with the quality of its cuisine; conversely, if they are less than satisfied, they will choose to dine elsewhere (Serhan & Serhan, 2019).

H_1: Food attributes have positive impact on customer satisfaction.

H_2: Food attributes have negative impact on switching intention of customers.

Switching Motives

Motives to switch refer to any factors that drive customers to change their service providers. Switching motives refer to the incentives or benefits provided by competing restaurants that entice customers to leave their current choice and switch to a different one. These could include promotional offers, discounts, loyalty programmes, convenience factors, or perceived improvements in service quality. The switching could also be prompted by other variables, such as innovative choices (Chuah et al., 2017), the tendency to seek diversity (Jung & Yoon, 2012), and the influence of influencer groups. Some examples of marketing innovation activities by rival firms include new product launches, price changes, and advertising and sales tactics. Customers' liking for their existing service providers diminishes, and their propensity to migrate to an alternative provider escalates upon recognising the uniqueness of competitors' marketing mix strategies. In addition, it has been noted by Lee and Neale (2012) that customers are more prone to defect and the likelihood of new alternatives being introduced is higher in highly competitive markets. Their social circles probably had an impact on their propensity to switch.

H_3. Switching motives have positive impact on the switching intention of customers.

Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the outcome of higher performance levels compared with expectations, and conversely, dissatisfaction arises when expectations are not met (Aka et al., 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). In restaurants, customer satisfaction results in repeat patronage, loyalty, and word-of-mouth promotion. Customer satisfaction is inversely related to switching intention, meaning that as satisfaction increases, the likelihood of switching decreases (Wu et al., 2014; Althonayan et al., 2015; Pimenta, 2022). The dissatisfaction with the present service provider can induce a decision to switch to another service provider (Ahn, 2024). Previous research also claimed that customer satisfaction plays the role of a mediator in the relationship between food-related attributes and switching intention (Han et al., 2011). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_4: Customer satisfaction negatively affects customers' intention to switch.

H_5: Customer satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between food attributes and switching intention.

Switching Barriers

A switching barrier has been defined as any element introduced by the service provider that hinders customers from switching to alternative service providers (Xue & Jo, 2024). These barriers can be financial, procedural, or psychological and are designed to discourage customers from switching to competitors (Young et al., 2011; Valenzula, 2012). The problem of switching cost is multifaceted and intricate. Procedural transitioning cost denotes the duration and exertion necessary for the adoption process or transition to a new service or product. Financial switching costs and relational switching costs refer to the financial and psychological charges pertaining to the transition from one alternative to another.

In the context of the restaurant industry, switching barriers includes brand loyalty, quality, consistency, cost of

switching, convenience, and customisation, among others. Switching barriers have a negative effect on customers' intention to switch (Kumar & Sathish, 2011; Wang et al., 2025). These barriers significantly affect customers' choice to remain with a service provider (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Satriadi et al., 2022).

Customer satisfaction and switching propensity are mediated by switching obstacles; it suggests that the ease or difficulty of switching plays a significant role in customers' decision-making process. Previous research also suggested that only customer satisfaction might not be sufficient to keep the customers in the long term. According to Chebat et al. (2011), switching barriers are effective for keeping customers from defecting when service problems are prevalent (Manan et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2023). Significant switching obstacles may deter customers from transitioning to competitors, even in a situation of dissatisfaction with their existing experience. The study examined the influence of switching obstacles on the correlation between customer satisfaction and the propensity to switch. Hurdles to switching significantly affect client retention. Customers' satisfaction and repurchase intentions are moderated by switching barriers (Han et al., 2011; Klein & Schmitz, 2016).

H_6: Switching barriers have an impact on the association between customer satisfaction and the intention to switch.

Table 1: Hypotheses Summary

Hypothesis	Proposed Relationship	Proposed Outcomes
H_1	Food-related attributes – Customer satisfaction	Positive
H_2	Food-related attributes – Switching intention	Negative
H_3	Switching motives – Switching intention	Positive
H_4	Customer satisfaction – Switching intention	Negative
H_5	Food-related attributes – Customer satisfaction – Switching intention	Mediation
H_6	Switching barriers*Customer satisfaction – Switching intention	Moderation

Source: Literature review.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire for the current study has been developed through a systematic process to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. Measurement items were adapted from previous research and adapted to align with the casual dining setting. Before finalising the questionnaire, pilot study was conducted with 113 respondents, and feedback was used to modify the wording, structure, and sequence of the questions. The restaurant owners, managers, and subject matter experts were also involved whose insights helped in enhancing the clarity, relevance, and practical applicability of the questionnaire. Minor adjustments were made to enhance clarity and contextual fit without altering the original meaning. The questionnaire was structured into two main sections: (1) demographic information (age, gender, marital status, occupation) and (2) assessment of food-related attributes, satisfaction, switching motives, switching barriers, and switching intention. Statements concerning food presentation, freshness, safety, healthy choices, menu selection, serving temperature, and variety were grouped under 'Food-Related Attributes' (FRA) and were adapted from Slack et al. (2021) and Singh et al. (2021). Measures for attractive alternatives, variety-seeking tendency, and recommendations from others were adapted from Jung and Yoon (2012), Ha and Jang (2013), and Hyun and Perdue (2017) for the construct 'switching motives'. Items assessing 'customer satisfaction' including satisfaction with food, service, ambience, and overall experience were adapted from Han and Ryu (2012), Ryu et al. (2012), Slack et al. (2021), and Singh et al. (2021). To evaluate switching barriers, both relational and financial switching barriers were included, based on scales developed by Han and Ryu (2012) and Hawari (2014). Finally, statements measuring switching intention, such as the likelihood of switching and the expectation of not remaining with the current restaurant, were adapted from Manan et al. (2017) and Hyun and Perdue (2017). A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was employed to capture the degree of respondents' agreement with each statement.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire. The population of the study comprises persons whose age is 18 years and older along with those who have recently dined at casual dining establishments. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed.

Data were collected primarily on weekends in NCR (India), with higher dining-out frequency, to capture more diverse and active restaurant-goers. Screening questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that respondents had prior experience dining at casual dining restaurants. These filter questions helped strengthen the validity and reliability of the collected data by confirming the appropriateness of the sample. Prior to collection of data, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the final analysis. From the 568 distributed questionnaires, five were discarded due to missing or incomplete data, leaving 563 complete and usable responses for analysis.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 563 respondents participated in the study. Of these, 53.10% were male and 46.90% were female. Respondents aged 25 to 35 accounted for the majority (61.82%) of the sample, followed by 16.87% in the 35–45 age group, 13.85% under the age of 25, and 7.46% aged 45 and above. In terms of marital status, 40.70% were married with children, 32.70% were married, and 26.60% were unmarried. Regarding occupation, 45.30% were private employees, 18.10% government employees, 16.00% self-employed, 13.00% students, and 7.60% fell into the 'others' category. This demographic distribution reflects a diverse sample, primarily composed of working adults within the target age range for casual dining consumers.

Table 2: Respondents Profile

Categories		Number (n = 563)	Percentage
Gender	Male	299	53.10
	Female	264	46.90
Age	Less than 25	78	13.85
	25–35	348	61.82
	35–45	95	16.87
	45 and above	42	7.46
Marital status	Unmarried	150	26.60
	Married	184	32.70
	Married with children	229	40.70
Occupation	Student	73	13.00
	Self-employed	90	16.00
	Private employee	255	45.30
	Government employee	102	18.10
	Others	43	7.60

Common Method Bias

The behavioural relationships are prone to the inflation of correlations caused by common method bias (CMB). This refers to a particular form of method variance occurring when various measures of the same construct or distinct constructs share the identical measurement procedure. Using SPSS software, this study used the principal component analysis method in conjunction with Harman's one-factor test. In line with Harman's single-factor test, CMB is considered a concern if a single factor accounts for more than 50% of the total variance in the data. The analysis's findings suggested that CMB is not a problem in the current dataset because the biggest variance explained by a single construct only accounted for 29.501% of the total variance.

Data Analysis Method

The current study employed partial least squares (PLS) path-modelling, specifically using Smart PLS 4 software. The choice to adopt this methodology was based on the characteristics of the sample and model, emphasising mediation and moderation analysis. PLS path-modelling has been widely utilised in management studies, making it a suitable choice for the current research. The two-stage analytical procedure is followed where the measurement model is assessed before testing the structural model. This method simultaneously represents a series of equations within the developed model and establishes the relationships among constructs. PLS-SEM employs variance analysis, a function that Smart PLS is capable of performing. PLS does

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via soft modelling techniques, which do not have any limits about data distribution.

To evaluate the measurement model, initial analyses included the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha. Discriminant validity and correlations were then assessed to validate the theoretical model. Subsequently, SEM was employed to test the proposed hypotheses.

Estimation of the Measurement Model: To find out if the concept was valid and consistent within itself, the measurement model was examined. Reliability and validity tests were conducted on reflective measurement models.

Cronbach's Alpha: The assessment of the instruments' reliability in the research was conducted by employing Cronbach's alpha. Measurement scale validity was established, with values recorded at 0.871 for food-related attributes, 0.891 for customer satisfaction, 0.912 for switching barriers, 0.930 for switching motives, and 0.900 for switching intention. The study met the Cronbach's alpha threshold of above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2020) suggesting that all the variables tested were good at forming latent variables. A CR value exceeding 0.7 signifies a strong model and is deemed extremely satisfactory for initial research phases. Based on this investigation, the CR values range from 0.900 to 0.942, as depicted in Table 3.

Convergent Validity: The examination of construct validity involved the assessment of AVE and CR. Fornell and Larcker recommended 0.5 as the lower limit for convergent validity (AVE). According to the findings, the convergent validity value for the variables provided meets the criteria. All the constructs are having a value of AVE > 0.5, as shown in Table 3. The range of AVE of constructs taken in the current study lies between 0.563 and 0.672.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Food-Related Attributes	FRA1	0.757	0.871	0.874	0.9	0.563
	FRA2	0.733				
	FRA3	0.761				
	FRA4	0.719				
	FRA5	0.749				
	FRA6	0.761				
	FRA7	0.771				
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.785	0.891	0.895	0.915	0.606
	CS2	0.812				
	CS3	0.803				
	CS4	0.804				
	CS5	0.739				
	CS6	0.785				
	CS7	0.714				
Switching Barriers	SB1	0.714	0.912	0.916	0.927	0.586
	SB2	0.748				
	SB3	0.82				
	SB4	0.752				
	SB5	0.82				
	SB6	0.758				
	SB7	0.728				
	SB8	0.801				
	SB9	0.739				

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Switching Motives	SM1	0.748	0.93	0.937	0.942	0.672
	SM2	0.857				
	SM3	0.78				
	SM4	0.88				
	SM5	0.84				
	SM6	0.827				
	SM7	0.822				
	SM8	0.795				
Switching Intention	SI1	0.764	0.9	0.902	0.923	0.667
	SI2	0.822				
	SI3	0.822				
	SI4	0.835				
	SI5	0.828				
	SI6	0.827				

Source: PLS-SEM results.

Discriminant Validity: The analytical results in Table 4 demonstrate discriminant validity, as indicated by using HTMT ratio analysis. The purpose of this is to ascertain the degree to which each latent variable differs from other constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The recommended thresholds for the strict note were established at 0.85 or 0.9 to guarantee sufficient evidence of discriminant validity. Furthermore, all HTMT ratio values were much lower than 0.85 as indicated by the 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals suggesting that these constructs measure different aspects within the study. The discriminant validity of the framework is therefore sound.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio

	HTMT Ratio
Food-related attributes <-> Customer satisfaction	0.637
Switching barriers <-> Customer satisfaction	0.339
Switching barriers <-> Food-related attributes	0.501
Switching motives <-> Customer satisfaction	0.069
Switching motives <-> Food-related attributes	0.133
Switching motives <-> Switching barriers	0.298
Switching intention <-> Customer satisfaction	0.602
Switching intention <-> Food-related attributes	0.581
Switching intention <-> Switching barriers	0.46
Switching intention <-> Switching motives	0.289

Source: PLS-SEM results.

To ensure that the constructs were not highly linked, a collinearity test was run before the evaluation of the structural model. The results demonstrated that there was little to no multicollinearity, with variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.150 to 3.221 across all constructs, which is significantly less than the suggested limit of 3.3. After confirming the constructs' reliability and validity, the structural model's results were assessed. Smart PLS 4 was employed to evaluate the structural model.

Estimation of Structural Model

Using the bootstrapping technique, we ran 5,000 subsamples to establish the statistical relevance of the structural model parameters. To estimate the structural model, it is crucial to consider the assessment of multicollinearity, the determination of coefficients (R^2), the importance and significance of the path coefficients, the effect size (Hair et al., 2020), and predictive relevance.

Model Predictive Power (R^2): Sarstedt et al. (2021) defined the R^2 as a metric utilised to evaluate the predictive capability of a model. According to Hair et al. (2019), R^2 threshold values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are interpreted as indicating substantial, moderate, and weak level of explanatory power respectively. In the current study, the independent variable, food attributes caused 45.9% and 32.5% variances in switching intention and customer satisfaction respectively.

Using the blindfolding approach in PLS statistical analysis, the researcher may now obtain Q^2 after computing the R^2. Q^2 may be evaluated using cross-validated communality and cross-validated redundancy. A cross-validated redundancy with a Q^2 score greater than zero suggests that the model being evaluated has predictive importance. Conversely, if the Q^2 value is less than 0, it suggests a lack of predictive relevance. The Q^2 results were reported with a value of 0.300 and 0.193, which is more than zero. This study successfully developed a model with a high level of predictability.

Table 5: Saturated Model Result

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F^2	Q^2	SRMR
Switching intention	0.459	0.454		0.300	0.057
Customer satisfaction	0.325	0.324	0.106	0.193	
Switching barriers			0.030		
Switching barriers*Customer satisfaction			0.050		
Switching motives			0.061		
Food-related attributes			0.023		

Source: PLS-SEM results.

The effect size (F2) has values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, corresponding to modest, medium, and tremendous relevance. It has been argued that an F2 value less than 0.02 represents the absence of an effect. This study shows evidence of an effect because all of the values are more than 0.02 (Table 5).

Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is 'the root mean square disparity between the observed correlations and the model-implied correlations'. The absolute measure of fit, denoted as a perfect fit with a zero value, is also suggested by SRMR. An SRMR value of less than 0.08 is considered a satisfactory fit. The current research ensures that the model is accurate (Table 5).

Hypothesis Testing

The PLS-SEM technique and bootstrapping with a subsample of 5,000 were employed to examine the path coefficient and significance of the associations between the exogenous and endogenous components. Hypotheses were examined to determine the significance of the relationship. H_1 evaluates whether food attributes have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. The results revealed that food attributes have a significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta = .57$, $t = 12.428$, $p = 0.000$). It can be said that there is a significant positive relationship between food attributes (FRA) and customer satisfaction (CS). Therefore, it seems reasonable to accept the hypothesis (H_1) that customers are indeed more satisfied with higher food quality.

Consistent with hypothesis, food attributes exert a detrimental effect on switching intention with significance level of ρ-value (0.002) < 0.05 and the t-statistic value of 3.108 > 1.96. This finding may indicate that customers' switching intentions are inversely proportional to the intensity of their feelings about food qualities. Therefore, it appears that as customers' perception of food qualities increase, their likelihood of switching decreases. The second hypothesis H_2 has been accepted.

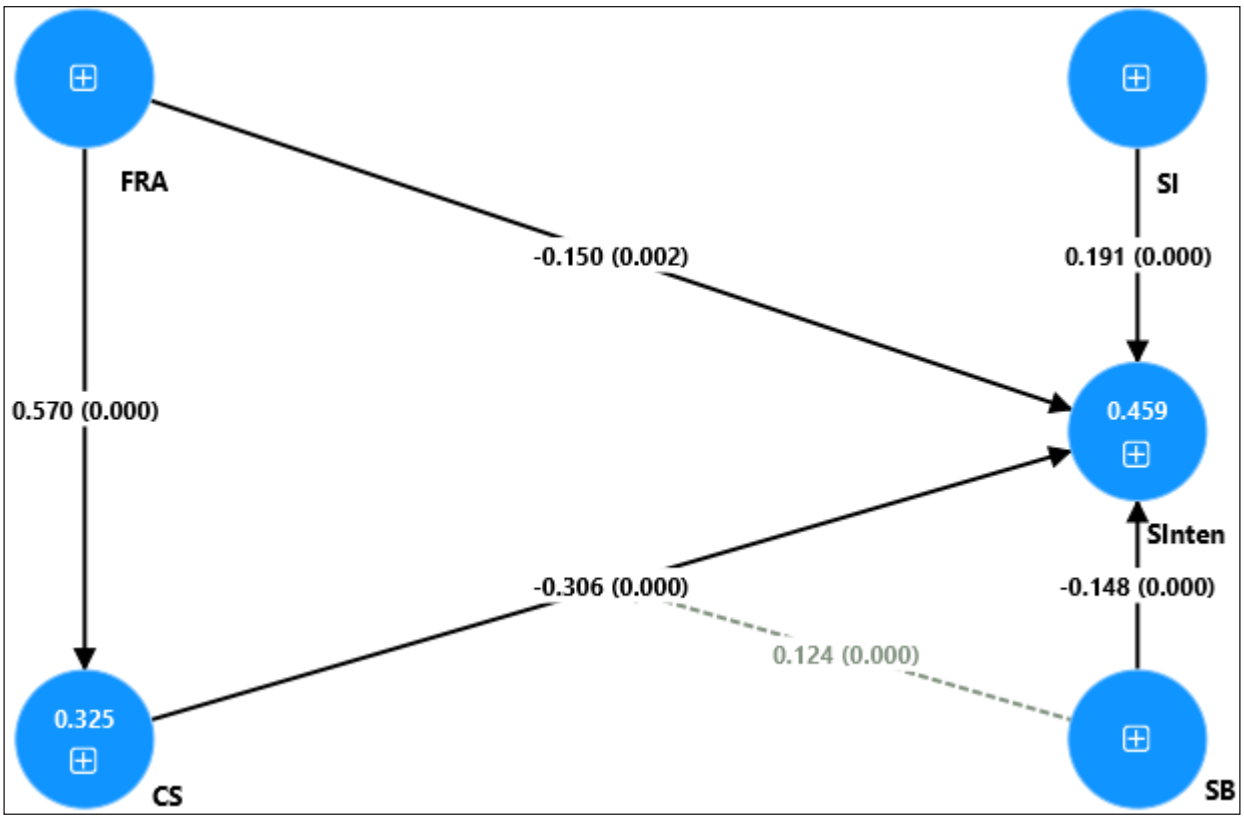

Fig. 1: Results from Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Furthermore, the t-statistic value of 6.517 for switching motives indicates a positive influence on switching intention. The observed value surpasses the critical threshold of 1.96, while the corresponding significance level (ρ-value) is 0.000, which is lower than the accepted threshold of 0.05. This finding suggests that switching motives have a positive impact on consumers' intention to switch (H_3 accepted). More switching motives induce customers to switch to the competitors.

Aligned with the proposed hypothesis, customer satisfaction exhibited a negative impact on switching intention, as evidenced by a t-statistic of 6.508. This value exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and with a p-value of 0.000, which is well below the accepted significance level of 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. According to this research, consumers' intention to switch is negatively affected by customer satisfaction (H_4 accepted).

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesised Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-Statistics	R^2	Result
Food-related attributes → Customer satisfaction (H_1)	0.57	12.428**	.325	Accepted
Food-related attributes → Switching intention (H_2)	-0.15	3.108*	.459	Accepted
Switching motives → Switching intention (H_3)	0.191	6.517**		Accepted
Customer satisfaction → Switching intention (H_4)	-0.306	6.508**		Accepted
Food-related attributes → Customer satisfaction → Switching intention (H_5)	-0.175	5.533**		Accepted
Switching barriers*Customer satisfaction → Switching intention (H_6)	0.124	4.215**		Accepted

Note: **p < 0.001, *p < 0.05.

Mediation and Moderation Analysis

This study explores a mediation model to assess the impact of food-related attributes on switching intention, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediating variable. It explores both the direct effect of food-related attributes on switching intention and the indirect effect in the presence of customer satisfaction. The study examined the mediating effects by using the variance accounted for (VAF) test, i.e., relation of indirect effect to total effect. According to Hair et al. (2019), the VAF provides the following conditions for mediation: no mediation occurs if the VAF is 0.2 or lower, partial mediation is present if the VAF is between 0.2 and 0.8, and full mediation is indicated when the VAF exceeds 0.8. This is a widely used and recommended technique. The table indicates that the direct effect of food attributes on switching intention, while accounting for customer satisfaction, was significant (β = -0.15, t = 3.108, p = 0.002). Similarly, the indirect effect of food attributes on switching intention through customer satisfaction was also significant (β = -0.175, t = 5.533, p = 0.000). The VAF, which represents the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect, was 0.54. This suggests that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between food attributes and switching intention. As anticipated in this research, attributes associated with food exert a noteworthy and favourable influence on the intention to switch, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediating factor.

The moderation model, which evaluates the effect of switching barriers on the relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention, was also analysed. The results revealed a statistically significant effect, as the t-statistic of 4.215 exceeds the critical value of 1.96. In addition, the p-value of 0.00 is significantly lower than the 0.05 threshold, reinforcing the statistical significance of the finding. As a result, Hypothesis 5 (H_5) is confirmed, showing a significant positive moderating effect of switching barriers on the relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention (β = 0.124, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that switching barriers amplify the negative relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals a clear positive effect of food attributes on customer satisfaction within the casual dining restaurant industry, which is in line with the findings of previous research (Ozdemir et al., 2015; Prayag et al., 2015; Anyasor & Njelita, 2020). Customers highly value aspects such as taste, quality, variety, and presentation of food, which positively influence their overall satisfaction with the dining experience. Moreover, we find that these positive perceptions of food attributes act as a deterrent to switching intention among customers. The literature further reveals that improvement in the food attributes can enhance customer satisfaction and reduces the switching rate. This suggests that investing in enhancing food quality, taste, and variety can serve as a potent strategy for fostering customer loyalty and retention in the competitive casual dining market. The study's conclusion supports the notion that customer satisfaction and switching intention are significantly correlated negatively (Wu et al., 2014; Althonayan et al., 2015; Pimenta, 2022). The mediating role of customer satisfaction has also been confirmed by the current study (Han et al., 2011; Oanh & Tho, 2024).

The study confirmed that switching motives positively influence switching intention; it suggests that customers are responsive to external stimuli that offer perceived value or benefits. This may indicate that customers are relatively price-sensitive, seeking better deals or experiences elsewhere. This is consistent with the previous findings that customers are more prone to defect when new alternatives are available in the market (Lee & Neale, 2012). The study still focused that recognition of the moderating effect of switching barriers on the relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention has strategic implications for businesses. The results are consistent with the previous findings (Han et al., 2011) that switching barriers influence the link between customer satisfaction and switching intention. Restaurants can focus on enhancing customer satisfaction and strategically managing switching barriers to strengthen customer retention efforts.

Theoretical Contribution

The results indicate that customers' behavioural intentions in casual dining restaurants were influenced by food-related qualities, customer satisfaction levels, presence of switching barriers and switching motives. Contributing to the theoretical foundation of the PPM framework in general, the study offers useful insights into the factors influencing customers' desire to move casual dining restaurants. This study's findings contributed significantly to the existing body of knowledge about the impact of food-related attributes, customer satisfaction, switching motives, and switching barriers on customer switching behaviour within the casual dining restaurant sector. This study examines the influence of restaurant characteristics on consumers' inclination to switch. Maximising customer happiness and preventing switching behaviour requires casual dining enterprises to build the appropriate amenities and have a deeper understanding of their clients. Restaurant managers

may improve client experiences and stimulate positive word-of-mouth by promoting emotional pleasure and facilitating interactive customer engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the extensive deliberation and supplementation in the current study, it is vital to admit the existence of certain constraints. However, these constraints are anticipated to offer valuable research prospects for subsequent scholars. The study's findings are based on a small sample of restaurants in northern Indian that cater exclusively to the casual dining market. To better understand the generalisability of our findings and replicate our work in different circumstances, more research is advised (Adler et al., 2023). Future research is suggested to use online food orders to explore the relation among the constructs. The research is restricted in scope since it only focuses on food-related attributes, customer satisfaction, switching motives, and switching barriers. However, several additional variables might potentially impact switching intention. Furthermore, instead of switching cost as a moderator, socio-demographic and psychological variables could be substituted as influential alternatives. Researchers can provide recommendations for future study, including the need for longitudinal studies rather than only focusing on the intentions. This will allow for more thorough analysis by periodically monitoring customer activity in switching the restaurants.

CONCLUSION

In today's highly competitive food industry, customer satisfaction is crucial for the growth of the business. When customers are satisfied with their experience, they are more likely to return for future purchases and also recommend it to their friends and family members. The presence of effective switching motives highlights the competitive nature of the restaurant industry. Restaurants are continuously vying for customers' attention and loyalty by offering incentives that differentiate them from competitors. Restaurants may need to focus more on other factors also to differentiate themselves and retain customers. Restaurant managers must prioritise factors such as overcoming switching obstacles and using relationship marketing strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of their establishment. Continuous monitoring of customer preferences and market trends enables restaurants to adapt and stay competitive. Overall, understanding the relationship between food quality, switching behaviour, and customer satisfaction is key to long-term success.

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