Repurchase Intention and Off-site Consumption of Fast Food Among South African Millennials Post Covid-19 Pandemic

Thebe Jonathan Magapa⊙
Marketing Retail Business and Sport Management, Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, Email, thebem@vut.ac.za

Lehlohonolo Amos Masitenyane*⊙
Marketing Retail Business and Sport Management, Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark, South, Email, lehlohonolom3@vut.ac.za
Corresponding Author

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the Millennial consumer's consumption of fast food post-COVID-19 pandemic era. Very few studies examined Millennial consumers repurchase intentions of fast food for off-site consumption, especially in emerging markets. Applying quantitative survey method using a non-probability convenience sample with 500 questionnaires to collect data from the southern region of Gauteng province in South Africa. A proposed theoretical framework was applied to examine associations between exogenous and endogenous latent variables influencing Millennial consumers' perceived price (PP) and food quality (FQ) towards their repurchase intention (RI) of fast food, moderated by word-of-mouth (WOM). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 26.0 employing Structural Equation Model (SEM) to analyse data were commissioned. Results advocate that several guidelines for off-site consumption of fast food by Millennial consumers following PP and FQ significantly impacted RI. The study adds to the existing consumer behaviour body of knowledge relative to RI of fast-food consumption. Only consumers from southern Gauteng province were investigated excluding other provinces. Practical implications to fast-food outlet managers and industry stakeholders on how to progress operative strategies to enhance consumption and support for their offerings are provided.

Keywords: Fast-food; perceived price; food quality; word-of-mouth; repurchase intention

Introduction

Following the overarching trajectory of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has negatively hit the global market, the undifferentiated imperatives of saving people's lives and livelihoods by applying nonpharmaceutical health and safety protocols to curb people's movement and consumption patterns became important for government across the globe (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). For businesses to survive while striving for efficiency and customer satisfaction (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020), many including the fast-food markets were forced to adapt as people's movement was restricted and how they go out to enjoy a meal in a safe and conducive environment whenever they want, was put on hold (Grayson, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak forced many fast-food businesses to close shop and those that survived had to re-visit their business models and resort to off-site sales and consumption as a suitable alternative to keep them afloat (Zanetta et al., 2021). Chun & Nyam-Ochir (2020) found that people tend to have less time to prepare home-cooked meals and seem to continue looking for valuable fast, convenient, time-saving, and delicious foodstuff for off-site or home consumption. Essentially, although the COVID-19 pandemic brought about innumerable changes to business operations, an apparent affluence of fast-food orders for off-site consumption experienced by many outlets even posts the pandemic era is experienced by many outlets (Gavilan et al., 2021).

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Even though fast food business operators and their customers have always been familiar with off-site fast-food ordering processes before COVID-19. However, literature on consumer behaviour theory reveals that consumer consumption of certain foods differs from one customer to the other and hence, a growing pattern of off-site fast-food purchases is witnessed. For example, Morkunas and Rudiene (2020) underline the comparative importance of the role that fast-food menu designs insinuate to various customers as a measure used to induce their food ordering patterns. In addition, Lee and Kim (2020) state that a well-organised menu presentation represents the quality of food offered as a distinctive type of marketing approach that entices consumers. Prasetyo et al. (2021) reiterate that the food menu is one factor that influences the customer decision-making process and assists businesses in keeping their brands fresh in the customer's minds, adding to their favourable communication about what they have consumed to others. The South African Millennial consumer cohort presents an appealing opportunity to investigate consumers representing around 31.5 percent of the global population that has substantial disposable income (Thusi & Maduku, 2020). This is a consumer segment of the population considered the largest among other generational cohorts, regarded as generous spenders of their income, particularly on fast food (Nyheim et al., 2015). The Millennials are part of a society born between 1982 and 2002 (Elam et al., 2007), who coexist in the era of information technology and are well poised to mold future economic advancements, which necessitate empirical investigations (Szekely & Nagy, 2011).

Bevan-Dye et al. (2011) highlight that understanding the behaviour of this generational cohort is important, bearing in mind that when they are dissatisfied with a service experience or product, they tend to be very vocal about their dissatisfaction and wilt a great deal of patriotism when they are satisfied by what they have consumed (Pentz et al., 2014). This inquiry aims to examine how South African Millennial consumers' PP of fast food and FQ influences their WOM communication, which impacts their RI post-COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of what influences customer buying patterns would be useful to fast-food business operators and managers to properly model and expediently serve customers in this era. Against this background, the South African millennial consumer cohort is selected as a group of interest to investigate how PP and FQ influence their WOM communication leading to their RI. It is a known fact that there are insufficient empirical investigations conducted in South Africa, that seek to understand the relative importance of attributes that affect customer's repurchase intention of fast food for off-site or home consumption, particularly with the Millennium consumer cohort. No known study particularly in South Africa's fast-food market examined relationships between the proposed study constructs exploring Social Exchange Theory (SET) and its effect on Millennial consumers' fast food RI post the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is structured as follows: An introduction and background are first given. This will be followed by discussions on the overview of the South African fast-food industry. The study problem statement will then be provided, followed by a presentation on the theories underpinning this study and the research method that this study follows will then be presented. The study results will then be presented and deliberations on the managerial implications and study limitations will conclude the study.

Literature review

In today's customer-centric world, the quality-of-service providers' offerings are important for their continued existence. Many empirical studies found that services have become a critical factor for business survival even in the food services industry (Kim et al., 2021). The fast-food industry has proved to be one of the leading and most dynamic industries globally (Euromonitor, 2018), with revenue contributions of about $3,145 billion to the global economy that grew by (3.17%) in 2017 to $506.3 billion consumption volume in transactions

(Marketline, 2018a). The South African fast-food industry is also classified among the major contributors to the country's economic growth, at an annual revenue rate of about $35.1 billion (Marketline, 2018b). Ledikwe et al. (2020) state that South Africa's fast-food industry advanced into a competitive business environment and a pillar of strength, dominated by approximately 14.5 million young adult consumers who tend to enjoy their foodstuff for off-site consumption more often compared to other consumer segments (Mhlanga et al., 2015).

Dlamini et al. (2021) state that South African fast-food consumers normally prefer affordable, quickly served large food portions for immediate consumption. Other researchers such as (Abdullahi, 2018) as well as Constanza and Gary (2015), identified other consumer consumption patterns to include perplexity in the marketing campaigns and the non-existence of differentiation that influences their purchasing decisions. Even post the COVID-19 pandemic and its impediments which tended to break the supply chain and distribution, more people continue to make their fast-food purchases for off-site consumption (Donthu and Gustafsson, 2020), demonstrating a greater continued shift in consumer fast-food consumption patterns. Xue et al. (2021) warns that it is therefore important for fast-food business operators to appreciate the latest consumer consumption tendencies when dealing with modern consumer buying behaviours. The increasing competition levels and new business entrants including independent and chain food stores offering food alternatives in the fast-food market (d'Angelo et al., 2021), all are exacerbated by consumer consumption patterns influenced by their lifestyles and technological advancements.

The growing rate of the South African fast-food market is indivisible by the arrival of an array of food and beverage brand offerings and consumption patterns, which have become a culinary trend in the country. Consumer consumption patterns that are influenced by human lifestyles and technological advances are factors that influence the emergence of food and beverage consumption patterns in society (von Braun et al., 2021). Millennials is a term created by Howe and Strauss (2000) and refers to a group of consumers including Baby Boomers and Generation X cohorts. Millennials are part of a society that has a lifestyle that is by current conditions, and this generation was born between 1982 and 2002 (Dimock, 2019) and tend to coexist with information technology so that it will be easy to access and obtain information including the latest concerning the food and beverage industry. Customer satisfaction delivers a leading indicator of consumer purchase intentions and loyalty towards a product or service.

The fast-food industry is continuously becoming a complex and very competitive business environment. Das et al. (2022) state that the increasing appearance of substitute products, and the fact that consumers are becoming increasingly demanding and selective). This situation forces fast-food business operators to adapt their operational channels to better satisfy customer needs and business survival. Lately, the failure or success of fast-food businesses remains and relies on numerous attributes such as customer service, product price, food quality, promotions, and distribution channels aimed at securing customer repurchase behaviour. The literature documents the importance of these aspects prevalent in the fast-food industry, mainly from developed markets. Very few empirical studies investigated what influences customer repurchase intention of fast food for off-site consumption in developing markets including South Africa's fast-food industry.

According to the researcher's best knowledge, no study in South Africa has provided a comprehensive view that benefits knowledge and understanding of how consumer perceptions of PP and FQ influence their WOM communication that could lead to RI of fast-food for off-site consumption, particularly, by the Millennium consumer cohort. For this reason, to add to the existing body of knowledge and to curb the existing research gap, this study aims to gain insight by investigating the effects of the South African Millennial consumer perceptions of PP

and FQ on their WOM that could lead to RI of fast-food for offside consumption in the post COVID-19 era.

Conceptual and hypothesis development

The notion of repurchase intention is espoused and reformed from both the social psychology and marketing perspectives. Social psychologists applied the SET to verify the individual's intention to continue supporting a particular service provider (Thibault and Kelley, 1959). Cropanzano et al. (2017) describe SET as a behavioural or attitudinal response from an individual in reciprocity that can result in an association. Therefore, SET is one key common phenomenon used to understand human behaviour (Ahmad et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study proposes a theoretical framework hypothesised to investigate the association between exogenous and endogenous latent variables affected by customer PP and FQ mediated by WOM leads to consumer RI of fast food for off-site consumption post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature reveals that various researchers advanced models to investigate the effects of WOM on key concepts such as brand trust (Shu-Fen and Wu, 2017), loyalty (Al-Ghamdi and Badawi, 2019), and reputation (Bianchi et al., 2019). However, no known study especially in the South African fast-food market offered an inclusive interpretation of how PP and FQ impact customer repurchase intentions moderated by WOM. Appropriately, this inquiry exploits a single model as a distinctive measure to obtain insights into, how these variables lead to off-site fast-food consumer's RI. The study presents a revised framework adapted from Hellier et al.,'s (2003) model, to the structural model. Figure 1 represents the theoretical research framework of this study.
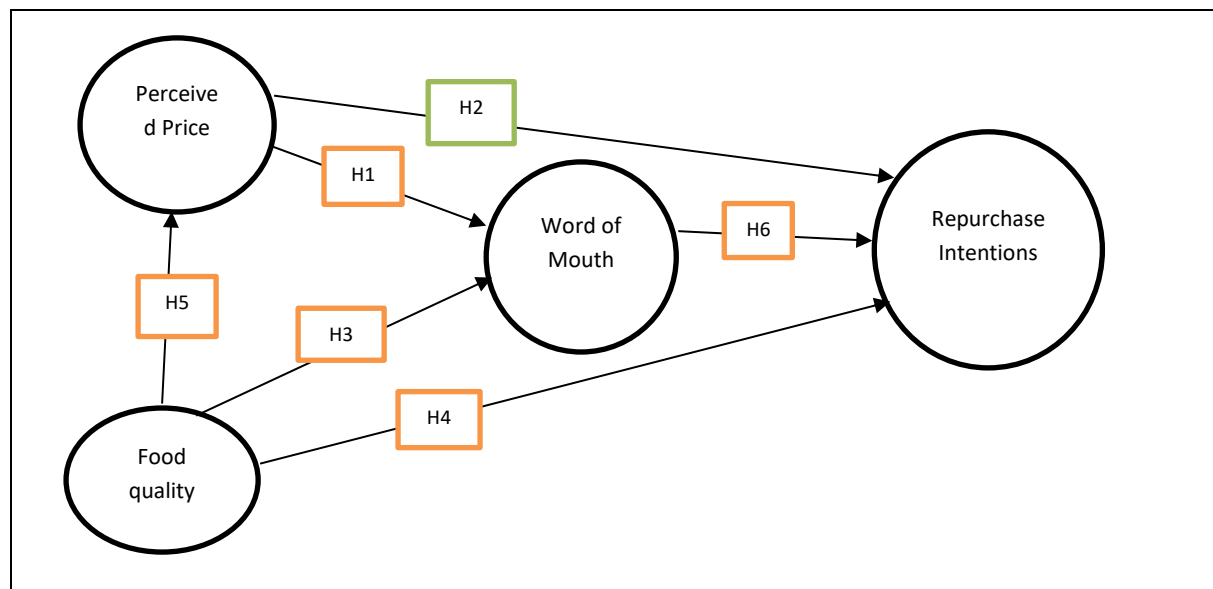

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
Source: Authors compilation

Perceived price (PP)

Zhong and Moon (2020) elucidated that PP does not reveal what is bestowed by the customers relative to the costs and price paid in buying products. PP is expressed as the customer's subjective view of the product relative to the price charged. The customer's overall valuation of the price requested for a product is influenced by several factors including customer service (Mahajan, 2020). The actual product price not only enhances product quality but certainly impacts its subjective value (Yi et al., 2018). Therefore, PP emanates from the customer's perceptual value of the product and/or service to be consumed (Quareshi, 2019). Zhao et al.

(2021) contend that value perceptions are consequently, viewed as vital factors in the consumer decision-making process even for future purchase intentions.

Interrelationship between PP and WOM

WOM is pronounced as an informal and voluntary shared communication by customers about their experiences with others (Sun et al., 2021). WOM is considered more important in marketing to encourage potential customers to try a recommended service provider (Packard & Berger, 2017). Bambauer-Sachse and Young (2023) highlight that WOM is applied to convey either positive or negative information by an individual to others. Positive WOM communication by customers about their service experiences can influence other customers repurchase intention of the same item from the same service provider due to happy memories (Gilovich et al., 2015). However, it should be noted that for WOM to be well received it depends on various factors that include the clarity of the message, the reputation of the messenger, and the way the message is conveyed (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). Previous studies such as Liang and Corkindale (2019); Muzamil et al. (2018); Oluwafemi and Dastane (2016) from various industries have found that a relationship between PP and WOM does exist. It should be noted though that, none of these studies were done in South Africa. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

> *H1. Perceived price is positively linked with customer word-of-mouth.*

Interrelationship between PP and RI

Realising that the practice of preserving customers with the hope of increasing their RI is very important (Fungai, 2017). Customer RI largely depends on the benefits received from previous service consumption or encounters with the service provider (Olaru et al., 2008). Previous studies have demonstrated that there is a link between PP and RI. Numerous studies found that when customers deem the product price to be reasonable, they are more likely tend to continue purchasing the same product in the future (Khan et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2011). Other studies which also found that a relationship between PP and RI does exist include Moslehpour et al. (2016) as well as Duan et al. (2008). However, when the product price is higher than the industry average, customers will be less likely to repurchase the same product from the same service provider (Khan et al., 2012). Therefore, this study also hypothesises that:

> *H2. Perceived price has a positive influence on customer repurchase intention.*

Interrelationship between FQ and WOM

FQ can be outlined as healthiness to be used as food ingredients for consumption and leads to customer satisfaction. FQ is considerably associated with customer fulfillment, and it is an important predictor of customer behavioural patterns (Abdullah et al., 2018; Ozdemir & Caliskan, 2015). Moyal and Mishra (2018) state that FQ in the fast-food industry is defined as the degree to which the food satisfies customer desire at a time. Therefore, FQ is an important component that is continuously revealed to be a meat value that customers judge before concluding which fast-food outlet to support (Namin, 2017). Various inquiries for example Zhong and Moon (2020); Hanaysha (2016); Ha and Jang (2012); Namkung and Jang (2007), examined different characteristics of FQ such as menu options, presentations, freshness, and tastes.

Accordingly, FQ is considered an unconditional necessity to satisfy customer food needs (Peri, 2006). Millennial customers who commonly prefer eating good quality and delicious food (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020), regard FQ as one aspect they consider when

patronising a fast-food establishment (Kumar et al., 2010; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). This suggests that the quality of food and service conditions are shaped by customers' perceived value, which influences their future buying behaviour (Lai, 2014). The customer experience of eating quality food creates unforgettable memories they would be tempted to share with others (Jalivand et al., 2017). Numerous studies such as Chun and Nyam-Ochir (2020); Hanaysha (2016) as well as Namkung andJang (2007), investigated the effects of FQ on customer repurchase intentions and found that a relationship between the FQ and customer WOM does exist. Hence, this study hypothesises that:

H3: Food quality has a significant influence on customer word-of-mouth.

Interrelationship between FQ and RI

FQ is found to be the leading driver of a customer's future behavioural intentions and influences customer propensity to revisit an establishment (Han & Hyun, 2017; Ozdemir & Caliskan, 2015). FQ is found to contribute to customer satisfaction, customer retention and influences customer future repurchase intention (Banerjee & Singhania, 2018; Huang et al., 2014). In line with this finding, Yuliantoro et al. (2019) also found that FQ influences customer fulfillment that affects their RI, particularly among the Millennial generation cohort in a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Taiwanese food and beverage industry. Thus, improving the quality of food is anticipated to stimulate customer RI for fast-food establishments. Therefore, the following hypothesise is proposed:

H4: Food quality directly and positively influences customer repurchase intentions.

Interrelationship between FQ and PP

One criterion that customers use to evaluate the quality of food is using PP (Fang et al., 2014). FQ is an important condition that fulfils consumer needs and expectancies (Peri, 2006). Harun et al. (2018) agree that FQ is a basic component and most important factor of consumer fast-food operator selection, based on their overall service experience. Therefore, understanding customer PP and FQ could help to close perceptual gaps that may exist by designing an appropriate value proposition, that is based on a win-win situation between the service provider and their customers (Blythe, 2013). Tingchi Liu et al. (2013) further posit that price versus quality as a determinant of product quality influences the evaluation of the price to be charged. Previous studies such as Paramananda & Sukaatmadja (2018); Khan et al. (2012), give evidence that PP is a central variable that propels customers' RI. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H5: Food quality directly and positively influences customer-perceived price.

Interrelationship between WOM and RI

Customer RI is measured through positive WOM communication which is vital in the service industry (Sivadas & Jindal, 2017), while social influence represents WOM which impacts individual behaviour toward conformity leading to a decision (Zhang et al., 2019). Recently, there has been little agreement on the effects of WOM on customer RI following their experience with the service provider. For example, when a customer is pleased with the fast-food operators' service experience, this does not mean that the customer's family and friends share the same sentiments about their experiences. Customer perceptions of service quality received are thus, important in generating positive WOM among potential customers (Lam et al., 2009). Accordingly, WOM is a primary factor that is associated with 20 to 50 percent of

all purchasing decisions (Berger, 2014), as satisfied customers bring in three more customers (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Prior studies found a significant relationship between customer WOM and customer RI in the cosmetics industry and movie industry (Moslehpour et al., 2017; Duan et al., 2008). This study attempts to examine the impact of WOM on RI in the South African fast-food industry by hypothesising that:

H6. Word-of-mouth positively influences millennial customers' repurchase intention.

Research method and data collection
This study followed a quantitative research approach using primary data. The choice of this method was appropriate considering that the quantitative research approach is cost-effective, the study questionnaires can be quickly administered, and the data analysed and interpreted with ease (Mckenzie, 2013). A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed (Etikan et al., 2016), using a self-administered questionnaire for data collection. This approach was deemed fit with a sample size purged at 500 study respondents consistent with previous SEM studies (Hair et al., 2014). The study received 483 properly completed questionnaires for statistical analysis from South African Millennial fast-food consumers residing in the Vaal region of Gauteng province in Vanderbijlpark town. The rationale for choosing this target population was based on their accessibility and observation of their fast food buying and expenditure patterns (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Primarily, the study respondents were given a consent form to sign in respect of the research ethical principles, before the data collection took place (Malhotra et al., 2013). Two university research professors and one fast-moving consumable goods (FMCG) industry expert reviewed the study questionnaire to evaluate content validity and the structure of the measuring instrument.

Measures
The demographical profile of the study respondents is in Section A of the study questionnaire. The measurement items and scales used in this study were adapted from previous marketing and fast-food research studies. Section B represents indicators of the PP construct adapted from (Hanaysha, 2017). Section C characterises FQ construct with items adapted from Konuk (2019) and Hanaysha (2016) studies. Section D represents the WOM construct, and Section E specifies the RI construct with items adapted from Konuk's (2019) study. All scales were modified in terms of the wording to fit the study context. This research applied a Likert scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Data analysis and study results
The analysis process started with data cleaning for editing and coding objectives (Malhotra, 2010). Only 483 properly completed questionnaires were deemed fit for data analysis purposes in line with the scholarly advice of Malhotra et al. (2013), and those with missing data were discarded. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) versions 26.0 were applied to analyse the reliability and validity of the data. Table 1 presents the respondent's profile. From the respondents' profiles, most of the study participants were females with a 59% response rate. Also, the white customer group aged between 31 and 40 years old outshined the others as represented by their 46% participation rate. With respect to the participant's education level, those with undergraduate qualifications represented a lion's share of the market at (52.6%). The study respondents who earn a monthly salary of between R5000.00 and R10 000.00 and R10 001.00 and R15 000.00 are the two who exhibited high participation rates of (45.5%) and (35.2%) respectively. Judging by the respondent's percentage of the frequency of fast-food purchases for takeaway purposes, those

who purchase food more than 3 times a week at (5.2%) and (10.8%) of those who consume fast food between 1-3 times a week suggest that not a lot of people purchase takeaways, but rather prefers eating either home-cooked meals or inside the outlets. Also, most of the respondents purchase fast food for takeaway consumption only once a month (40.6%) and some 2 to 3 times per month (37.1%).

Table 1: Respondent's profile

Categorisation	Number of participants	Percentage of the total
Gender: Male	198	41
: Female	285	59
Total	483	100
Ethnicity		
: African	166	34.4
: White	222	46
: Asian	39	8
: Coloured	56	11.6
Total	483	100
Age		
: 21-30 years old	21	4.3
: 31- 40 years old	226	46.8
: 41-50 years old	197	40.8
: 51-60 years old	32	6.6
: 61 and over	7	1.5
Total	483	100
Education		
: High school/vocational	74	15.3
: Undergraduate	254	52.6
: Postgraduate	116	24
: Masters/Doctoral	39	8.1
Total	483	100
Monthly income		
: Less or equal to R5000 per month	67	13.9
: R5001 to R10000 per month	220	45.5
: R10001 to R15000 per month	146	30.2
: R15001 to R20000 per month	21	4.3
: R20001 to R25000 per month	22	4.6
: More than R25000 per month	7	1.4
Total	483	100
Frequency of fast-food takeaway purchases : 2 times every 3 months		
: Once a month	31	6.4
: 2-3 times per month	196	40.6
: 1-3 times a week	179	37.1
: More than 3 times a week	52	10.8
Total	25	5.2
	483	100

Source: Data from the study

Some of the responses on separate question items show the following: Concerning the respondents' PP and FQ hypothesised to be having an effect towards consumer repurchase intention of fast-food for takeaway purposes. The range is between (58%) and (68%). This suggests that those who took part in this study feel a reasonable amount of contentment with the prices and quality of food offered by their food outlets. An average of (62%) of them feel that they are getting good value on food items offered, which further explains their willingness to spread the good word to others about their satisfaction levels. Furthermore, this clarifies why the study participants articulated a solid will to repurchase their fast-food or take away purposes. In this inquiry, the reliability of the data, convergent and discriminant validities were all met. Pearson's correlation coefficient was also computed to verify the intensity and path of construct associations. Table 2 presents the correlation analysis results.

Table 2: Correlations between study constructs

		Perceived Price	Food Quality	Word of Mouth	Repurchase Intention
Perceived Price	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	483			
Food Quality	Pearson Correlation	0.744**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		
	N	483	483		
Word of Mouth	Pearson Correlation	0.726**	0.873**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	483	483	483	
Repurchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	0.645**	0.602**	0.617**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	483	483	483	483
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Measurement instruments analysis
Validity and reliability
The measurement instruments analysis for reliability and validity values are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of measurement instruments

Study constructs		Reliability tests			Validity tests		
		Item-total	Cronbach alpha α	CR	AVE	The square root of AVE	Outer loadings
PP	PP1	0.712					0.767
	PP2	0.917					0.867
	PP3	0.841	0.907	0.906	0.513	0.78	0.745
	PP4	0.811					0.765
FQ	FQ1	0.676					0.734
	FQ2	0.918					0.865
	FQ3	0.763					0.755
	FQ4	0.978					0.876
	FQ5	0.911	0.912	0.911	0.522	0.74	0.878
	FQ6	0.876					0.786
WOM	WOM1	0.819					0.734
	WOM2	0.802					0.767
	WPM3	0.959	0.872	0.871	0.536	0.68	0.878
RI	RI1	0.651					0.723
	RI2	0.642					0.686
	RI3	0.696	0.701	0.712	0.510	0.67	0.704
		≥0.50	≥0.70	≥0.70	≥0.50	≥0.50	≥0.60

Note: C.R= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted; Factor loadings computed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach using AMOS (27.0). Descriptive and reliability values (Cronbach α) values were computed using SPSS.

The study was conducted in the southern region of Gauteng province at Vanderbijlpark and Vereeniging towns. Cronbach's alpha values (α) and composite reliability (CR) were assessed to authenticate the reliability of the questions used in the study questionnaire. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was undertaken (Kinnear et al., 2010) to confirm construct essentials that form sets of answers (Costello & Osborne, 2005). CFA was used to measure the validity of the suggested model through relevant indicators. To measure the precision and rigor of the study constructs relative to what exists, the validity analysis as suggested by Zikmund et al. (2013) was executed. CFA determined whether items utilised in the measuring instrument could be used as certified by the study constructs (Bagozzi, 1994). SEM was used to analyse the relationship between the variables in the observed model.

Measurement model

An examination of the moderating effects of traditional values on the chosen associations in the structural model was conducted. AMOS was applied given its ability to examine a series of dependent associations instantaneously and its substance which promotes the overall method of data analysis known as the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine model causality (Arbuckle, 2013). The measurement of the model fit was confirmed by applying CFA for all the samples. For adequate models, the $\chi 2/df$ ratio had to be smaller than the limit value of 3, as suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Goodness-of-fit indices GFI, IFI, TLI and CFI values were greater than 0.9 (Byrne, 1998), and RMSEA was lower than 0.08 (Hair et al., 2006). The model fit indices specified the adequacy value from the discerned model: $\chi 2/df$ 1.957, NFI 0.973, RFI 0.967, GFI 0.955, IFI 0.987, TLI 0.983, CFI 0.987, RMSEA 0.045. CFA results demonstrate that the average variance extracted (AVE) is above the suggested value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming that the proposed study model had convergent validity. The composite reliability (CR) value for the model variables exceeded the 0.7 threshold following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommendation. Cronbach's α shows that a variable has a suitable level of internal consistency, with a value greater than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Structural model

After determining the reliability and validity of the measurement model, a structural model was enacted to examine the predictive connection among the study constructs. Table 4 presents the results of the proposed hypothesis.

Table 4: Hypothesis results

Path	Hypothesis	Path coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision
PP→RI	H1	0.751	0.155	2.876	***	Supported
PP→WOM	H2	0.432	0.138	1.754	0.057	Not supported
FQ→WOM	H3	0.784	0.146	3.256	***	Supported
FQ→RI	H4	0.645	0.164	2.987	0.002	Supported
FQ→PP	H5	0.678	0.158	1.646	***	Supported
WOM→RI	H6	0.687	0.148	3.034	***	Supported

Note 1*** p- value 0.01; 2. Using a significance level of 0.05 critical ratios (t-value) that exceed 1.96 would be deemed significant. Note: SE = Standard error; CR= Critical value; P= Probability value

The succeeding discussion emerges from the hypothesis results presented in Table 4. H1: PP of fast food for off-site consumption is positively linked with customer repurchase intention. The correlation correlation result (r = 0.645, p < 0.01) was supported by a path coefficient of 0.751. This finding corresponds with Liang & Corkindale's (2019) discovery that a significant relationship between the two constructs does exist. H2: A negative association between PP of fast food for off-site consumption and customer word-of-mouth communication was found with a path coefficient of 0.432, not supported. H3: The association between the quality of food and customers spreading positive word-of-mouth was on the other hand supported and confirmed by a path coefficient of 0.784. This result corroborates with findings from Chun & Nyam-Ochir (2020) as well as Hanaysha (2016), that a significant relationship between the two constructs does exist. H4: was supported with a path coefficient of 0.645 and correlation result (r = 0.602, p < 0.01) confirming that food quality has a significant influence on customer's repurchase intention of fast-food for off-site consumption. This result confirms the findings by Banerjee & Singhania (2018) that there is a positive link between the two constructs. H5 Food quality directly influenced customers' perceived price of fast food; hence, this hypothesis was supported as it reached a path coefficient of 0.678 and correlation result (r = 0.744, p < 0.01). H6: was also supported with a path coefficient of 0.687 and correlation of (r = 0.617, p < 0.01)

verifying the findings from other studies such (Moslehpour et al., 2017) that positive word-of-mouth does influence customer repurchase intentions.

Managerial implications and limitations

This study proposed a theoretical model built on four variables (PP, FQ, WOM and RI) and in so doing, advances an innovative framework that specifies practical indicators for fast-food outlet managers, researchers and industry stakeholders alike. Furthermore, by exploiting SET as a grounding premise, this study extends its application to the unforgotten fast-food market. Against this background, an investigation into other factors impacting customer contentment must be carried out. To moderate the likelihood of customers repurchasing fast food for off-site consumption rather than consuming it in-store, investigations should also be carried out to detect measures that foster positive consumer WOM about services rendered by the outlets. For fast-food outlet managers, the study findings shed light on how to arrange the distinguished variables in any fast-food outlet for maximised effects. Presented with a choice on what to put more emphasis on, managers need to explore new ways of improving customer repurchase intentions, as this has a massive influence on their continued business survival. Finally, the path coefficients between PP and RI as well as that between FQ and RI confirm this supposition. Customer PP has a more significant influence on repurchase intentions than the FQ received from their service provider.

Even though this inquiry has accomplished its objectives, it is however, important to consider its limitations. The study sample encapsulated respondents from the southern region of Gauteng province only. Other provinces of the country were excluded from the sample, which limits the generalisability of the study results. Therefore, caution must be exercised when interpreting the study results and be viewed as exploratory. A recommendation is also given that a longitudinal research approach with a probability sample should be utilised with forthcoming studies to verify the effectiveness of the research framework. Perhaps, a qualitative research design can yield more useful implications and a better understanding of the role played by other variables in the fast-food context.

Conclusion

The satisfactory statistical confirmation which suggests that the presence of variations in customer perceptions of food quality and prices towards the repurchase intention of fast food for off-site consumption was found, as hypotheses H1, H3, H4, H5 and H6 were supported. Strangely, this inquiry proved that customer-perceived price wielded an insignificant and negative effect on word-of-mouth and, thus, H2 was not supported. This suggests that South African fast-food outlet managers and industry stakeholders must develop improved operative strategies to enhance consumption and support for their offerings. Furthermore, this study advanced practical strategies on how fast-food service providers ought to understand the interrelatedness amongst the proposed study constructs. The application of recommended strategies pitched towards understanding fast-food consumer behaviour and how to enhance their repurchase intention could shape the service providers' competitive advantages in the fast-food environment from an emerging market's perspective. Accordingly, this inquiry concludes that the role of PP and FQ as foundations of competitive gains must be confirmed to increase customer positive WOM communication towards increased fast-food consumption for off-site purposes. In addition, it would be advisable for fast-food outlet managers to develop marketing tactics that integrate WOM communications that are customer-fit by assigning the two certified variables (PP and FQ) from the theoretical study framework.

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