

## 探討滿意度、再購意圖、和口碑傳播意圖之間的關係

### Discovering the Relationships among Satisfaction, Repurchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Output Intention

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#### 摘要

這研究的目的是要去探討消費者滿意度是否會直接影響消費者傳播口碑的行為；或者是要經由再購買意圖作為滿意度與口碑傳播意圖之間的媒介。消費者對產品和服務的滿意將會決定他們未來的購買意圖和口碑傳遞。Smith (1998)就指出消費者的再購買意圖、傳播口碑和顧客忠誠的決定因素是滿意度。

在這研究中，所運用的統計方法包含了信度分析、描述分析和結構方程式的路徑分析。分析的結論為服務的滿意度對再購買意圖和口碑傳播意圖沒有直接或者間接的影響；產品的滿意度會直接影響再購買意圖和間接影響口碑傳播意圖；環境的滿意度可以直接預測再購買意圖和口碑傳播意圖。也就是說再購買意圖是滿意度與口碑傳播意圖之間的媒介。

**關鍵詞：**消費者滿意度、再購買意圖、口碑傳播、結構方程式

#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether consumer satisfaction directly affect consumer word-of-mouth behavior or repurchase intention can play a mediating role between consumer satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention. Satisfaction with product and service will determine the customers' future purchase intention and word-of-mouth communication. Smith (1998) also indicated that consumer satisfaction can be a significant determinant of repurchase intention, dissemination word-of-mouth, and consumer loyalty in products and services.

In this study, the data was handled by the reliability test, descriptive analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM). After analyzing, the outcomes can be summarized in the following subjects. The path analysis displays that there was no direct effect and indirect effect among service satisfaction, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth output intention; for the product satisfaction, there was a direct effect to repurchase intention and an indirect effect to positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention; repurchase intention and word-of-mouth output intention were predicted directly by ambiance satisfaction, which

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meant that the repurchase intention can also play a mediating role between ambiance satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention;

**Keywords:** consumer satisfaction, repurchase intention, word-of-mouth, SEM

## **1. The Introduction**

Marketers believe that word-of-mouth plays a dominant role in the marketplace. More than one third of Americans ask the advice of their family and friends when they shop or patronize products because they would like to decrease the possibility of making a wrong purchase decision. Word-of-Mouth, obviously, becomes a key point leading potential customers to where it suggests. Researches indicate that word-of-mouth not only has a significant effect on consumer behavior (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999), but also plays an important role in the consumer's decision-making process (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). However, someone may question what word-of-mouth can do to benefit their business while the majority of marketers are carefully dealing with word-of-mouth. According to the US Office of Consumer Affairs, a dissatisfied customer will spread his/her negative word-of-mouth to nine other people with the bad experience that resulted in the dissatisfaction (Mangold et al., 1999). The damage the negative word-of-mouth can create seems tremendous if a company has been ignoring its existence.

In recent years, word-of-mouth was found to be even more pronounced and more important. No matter what kind of industries, this phenomenon has been revealed in different circumstances. The majority of researchers have emphasized the issues of how consumer behavior is influenced by word-of-mouth and why consumers provide word-of-mouth to others. Unfortunately, because word-of-mouth is totally out of a company's controlling range, those researchers will not be able to examine the role of word-of-mouth from the company's position. The only way to identify the role and function of word-of-mouth is to go deeper into the interaction among consumers (Ennew, Banerjee, & Li, 2000). Therefore, Reichheld (2003) suggested that a customer's aptitude to recommend or tell others about a product or service is the most important measurement in business today.

### **1.1 Problem Background**

Satisfaction has been considered as one of the most salient factors influencing consumer decision making, and has been taken into consideration by many practitioners while they implemented effective marketing strategies. Basically, satisfaction serves as an outcome from consumer purchase that consumers compare with the utilities they have perceived and costs they have invested. It is the evaluation of any outcome for consumers from their experience of using a product or service in mind. If customer satisfaction is considered as one of the customer's attitudes or perceptions, word-of-mouth output can be thought of as the

customers' behavior.

Many researchers point out that satisfied customers might engage in the dissemination of positive word-of-mouth, which has been viewed as a side-benefit of satisfaction (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; File & Prince, 1992; Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001; Swan & Oliver, 1989). On the other hand, Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) indicated that customer satisfaction does not directly relate to word-of-mouth communication, which was different from other previous researchers. For that reason, another issue should be addressed as to whether consumer satisfaction will directly affect consumer word-of-mouth behavior or there is mediator between consumer satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether consumer satisfaction directly affect consumer word-of-mouth behavior or repurchase intention can play a mediating role between consumer satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention.

## **1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In compliance with the purpose of the study for this paper the researcher put forward following research questions: What are the relationships among service/product/ambiance satisfaction, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth output intention? Based on the research questions, the hypotheses of this dissertation were as follows:

H1-1o: There is no significant relationship between service/product/ambiance satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1a: A significantly positive effect exists between service satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1b: A significantly positive effect exists between product satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1c: A significantly positive effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-2o: There is no significant relationship between service/product/ambiance satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2a: A significantly positive effect exists between service satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2b: A significantly positive effect exists between product satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2c: A significantly positive effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2d: A significantly negative effect exists between service satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2e: A significantly negative effect exists between product satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2f: A significantly negative effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3o: There is no significant relationship between repurchase intention and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3a: A significantly positive effect exists between repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3b: A significantly negative effect exists between repurchase intention and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

## **2. Literature Review**

A quantity of articles and books in the popular press note that word-of-mouth is a non-remunerative (Walker, 1995), ancient (Donaton, 2003), and forceful (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Mangold et al., 1999; Sliverman, 1997, 2001; Wee, Lim, & Lwin, 1995; Wilson, 1991) communication tool in the business world. Word-of-mouth communication plays an important role in the consumer's decision making process because it is powerfully influential in the consumers purchase intention and behavior (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969; Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, Mangold et al., 1999; Money, 2004; Swanson & Kelley, 2001; Wee et al., 1995).

### **2.1 Word-of-Mouth**

Derbaix and Vanhamme (2003) stated that word-of-mouth can be considered a kind of consumer-to-consumer communication. Furthermore, Hawkins, Best, and Coney (2001) defined that word-of-mouth communication is "individuals sharing information with other individuals" (p. 239). This type of communication is more credible and trustworthy than firm-tailored information sources (Bone, 1995; Gremler et al., 2001; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). In a customer viewpoint, word-of-mouth comes from an independent third party (Silverman, 2001), and this form of communication is not controlled by the company's operation (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003).

To summarize, word-of-mouth is an interpersonal and informal communication taking place among people without any gain contributed to anyone, in the form of face to face, or via the chatting room, e-mail, or discussion board on the Internet. Moreover, word-of-mouth can be considered a nature of communication consisting of the sender and receiver, and the interaction between them. Marketers should be aware that the roles of both the sender and the receiver are interchangeable because the receiver can become the next sender while he/she receives the verbal message and would like to disseminate it. This verbal message flow in the nature of information exchange can be considered as word-of-mouth diffusion.

Word-of-mouth plays different roles in varied stages of the purchasing process. During the prepurchase stage, word-of-mouth serves as an input source of information or stimuli (File, Cermak, & Prince, 1994). For example, when a customer asks someone to give him/her advice before purchasing a product or service, the advice can be considered as word-of-mouth input, which is used for reducing the consumer's perceived risk (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004). The result from Arndt's (1967a) study pointed out that when consumers perceived products or services as high-risk, they would make more exertion to seek any reliable word-of-mouth information. As compared with the prepurchase stage, the postpurchase stage provides a bed for consumers to output their word-of-mouth to the audience (File et al., 1994). When a customer shares his/her experience of the purchased product or service with others, his/her opinions such as satisfaction (praises) or dissatisfaction (complaints) can be considered as an output component of word-of-mouth diffusion process (File, Judd, & Prince, 1992; Swan & Oliver, 1989).

### **2.1.1 The Generation of Word-of-Mouth**

The results of consumers' prior experiences with their purchase can be categorized to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. If the consumers are satisfied with services or products, they will come up with delightful emotions to share positive dictions with other people. On the contrary, if the consumers are dissatisfied with the services or products, they will express wrathful temper to persuade someone, using negative words about the products or services (Teo & Lim, 2001).

A large number of studies mention that dissatisfied consumers employ complaint, negative word-of-mouth, and/or desertion against the companies which provide unfavorable services or products (Blodgett, Granbois, & Walters, 1993; Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Bolting, 1989; DeWitt & Brady, 2003; Kim, Kim, Im, & Shin, 2003). Whereas, as mentioned above, most dissatisfied customers would disseminate negative word-of-mouth, virtually all companies would rather their dissatisfied consumers be complainers instead of deserters. If a firm fails in its service, the dissatisfied customer might leave the firm. The firm has to spend more money to develop a new customer, because the cost for bringing in a new customer is five times more than maintaining a present customer (Blodgett, Wakefield, & Barnes, 1995; Maxham, 2001). Additionally, dissatisfied customers would also share their obnoxious experience with other people, which will certainly cause the firms to lose their market share (Griffin, 1998; Kim et al., 2003; Mooradian & Olver, 1997).

## **2.2 Satisfaction**

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) defined satisfaction as "the customers' evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs and expectations" (p. 86). Susskind (2002) declared that customer satisfaction refers to the

evaluation of any outcome for consumers from their experience of using a product or service. Basically, satisfaction is an outcome from consumer purchase that consumers compare with the utilities they have perceived and costs they have invested. In the restaurant business, the evaluations of customer satisfaction focus on not only the services and products (e.g., food and beverage), but also the physical environment (e.g., ambiance) (Spector, 1999). As noted by Susskind, consumers would rather evaluate the individual components (e.g., service, product, and ambiance) than the overall picture. For instance, if consumers are asked about their satisfaction toward the restaurant they have patronized, they might, instead of mentioning their overall satisfaction, respond that the restaurant food was good, the ambiance was romantic, but the service needed to be improved. However, service, product, and ambiance can not be separately sold by a restaurant.

The earlier pioneering satisfaction measurement, called SERVQUAL, was proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). The authors identified five dimensions of perception toward service: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, and compared them with consumers' expectations. The differences between consumers' perceptions and expectations serve as the indicator of consumer satisfaction. Although SERVQUAL is said to be useful in measuring service satisfaction, the questions employed in the fifth dimension show the authors' intention to measure consumers' satisfaction toward product and ambiance while they are purely measuring service in the first four dimensions (Hinkin & Tracey, 1998). Subsequently, Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) devised DINESERV to be employed in defining and measuring service quality for restaurant industries. Therefore, the following service, product, and ambiance are the three most important components in restaurant industry.

### **2.2.1 Service Satisfaction**

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) defined services as “deeds, processes, and performances” (p. 3). Service always refers to intangibility features (e.g., interpersonal encounters), because the service is a rendered experience which can not be touched, tasted, or tried before the purchase (Shostack, 1977). The interpersonal encounter (customer and employee) can also affect customer satisfaction. Past research has shown that customers do not like cold and impersonal service, and they desire for the employees to treat them in a friendly, helpful, polite and socially sensitive manner. When customers think they receive high levels of service consideration, they are led to higher satisfaction and are willing to give higher tips (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Moreover, Lee and Hing (1995) indicated that the employees' knowledge, appearance, and prompt service also contribute to the formation of consumers' satisfaction toward service. Although consumers need a restaurant service, however, service is an intangible object and can not be pre-experienced, they count on tangible cues (food and beverage) or physical environment (ambiance) to help them evaluate the restaurant before

their consumption.

### **2.2.2 Product Satisfaction**

Product refers to the tangible objects which consumers acquire to meet their perceived needs (Hawkins et al., 2001). In the restaurant business, products denote food and beverage. To examine customer satisfaction, food quality is one of the most important factors affecting consumers' repurchase intention. Safety, appeal, and dietary are the three attributes to determine food quality. Food safety refers to consumers' perception about whether food is fresh, undercooked, and sanitized. Food appeal pertains to the food's presentation, taste, colors, textures, temperature, and size of the portions. Nowadays, dietary has become an important issue for food quality, dietary meaning health foods, such as low fat, low carbohydrates, low cholesterol, and vegan (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). In Auty's (1992) study, she also mentioned that food quality and food types are the primary factors affecting consumers' choice of restaurants. In addition, service is not the only key factor influencing restaurant success, because the research results show that décor also has stronger correlations to the restaurant operational success (Susskind & Chan, 2000).

### **2.2.3 Ambiance Satisfaction**

Physical environment (i.e., the servicescape) is another form of tangible objects and elements of the physical environment, including exterior facility (such as signage, parking, and the landscape) and interior facility (such as design, layout, equipment, and décor) (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). In the hospitality industry (such as hotels and restaurants), the physical environment is one of the elements which will influence consumers' intention and satisfaction with their service experiences (Bitner, 1992). Furthermore, ambiance is associated with interior facilities, which are comprised of temperature, lighting, noise, music, scent, color, cleanliness, and style design. Restaurateurs employ these attributes to express their characteristics in order to impress consumers and create an expectation of the dining experience before the consumers are served. Seating comfort and waiting areas can also influence customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. Seating comfort includes design and condition of the furnishing (such as size and material of seats) and arrangement of the seats (such as cramped and crowded spacing). In addition, there is a positive relationship between customers' physical comfort and their perceived waiting time. For instance, if waiting areas are crowded and furnishings are uncomfortable, customers may perceive that the length of waiting time is longer. On the contrary, if waiting areas are roomy and décors are comfortable, the customers would enjoy the ambiance instead of concentrating on the time they have been waiting and have willingness to wait (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Moreover, physical setting can influence customers' satisfaction, desire to stay longer, and spending more money in the restaurant (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996).

### **2.3 Consumer Satisfaction Towards Repurchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth**

It is generally accepted that repurchase intention and word-of-mouth are the consequences of customer satisfaction. Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) mentioned that in further research, customer satisfaction is a good indicator of predicting future purchase behavior, because satisfied customers have an inclination to purchase the same product or service frequently and ignore competitive offers from competitors (Chiou, Droge, & Hanvanich, 2002). In Ranaweera and Prabhu's (2003) study, the authors proposed that customer satisfaction and customer retention are highly and positively correlative. Furthermore, Teo and Lim (2001) noted that, in retail industry, customer satisfaction is significantly related to repurchase intentions. For example, satisfied customers might decrease their repurchase intention if they perceive the retailer as being offensive. On the contrary, satisfied consumers might increase their intention of repurchase, even brand loyalty, if the retailer provides intimate service.

As Arndt (1976b) and Richins (1983) pointed out, both positive and negative word-of-mouth have received tremendous attention in the literature on satisfaction (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; File & Prince, 1992; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Swan & Oliver, 1989). File and Prince also pointed out that positive word-of-mouth has been demonstrated to have an association with satisfaction in several consumer markets, such as automotive and lodging. It seems that positive word-of-mouth has a symmetrical, linear relationship with satisfaction because the satisfied customers will have less intention to spread negative word-of-mouth, and the dissatisfied customers will never disperse positive word-of-mouth for the products or services with which they are not happy. Therefore, instead of describing the symmetrical and linear relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth, it would be better to consider their connection as cause-and-effect (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). The same conclusion can be found in the Hartline and Jones (1996) and Söderlund's (2003) study.

The above conclusion seems to naturally raise another converse thought of whether a dissatisfied customer will spread negative word-of-mouth as well. Some researchers have examined why the dissatisfied customers engage in the dissemination of negative word-of-mouth. Richins (1983) found that customers' dissatisfaction is a crucial determinant of dissemination of negative word-of-mouth. As Leonard-Barton (1985) noted, the behavior frequently made by customers who are dissatisfied with a purchase, or who have refused to use a product is shown by telling friends about the experience and encouraging them to avoid doing the same as they did. Richins (1983) argued that although negative word-of-mouth will be generated more than positive word-of-mouth, the negative may travel farther than a positive message through retransmission. However, dissatisfied customers might not have the power to force others to agree with them, but their opinion can have an adverse effect on the

reputation of products.

Customer satisfaction is associated with positive word-of-mouth (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; File & Prince, 1992; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Swan & Oliver, 1989). All consumers have their own experiences of satisfaction with the products they purchase or the services they use, resulting in their desire to spread positive word-of-mouth. In other words, to satisfy a consumer is one of the stimulations used to encourage the consumer to spread favorable word-of-mouth (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). The same point is also supported by Hartline and Jones (1996) who stated that the customer, who is satisfied with employees' performance, service quality, and/or service value, would increase positive word-of-mouth intention. Furthermore, in Söderlund's (2003) study, the relationship between word-of-mouth and customer satisfaction is presented by virtually symmetrical curves, such as the U shaped curve, which means that satisfied customers are more willing to engage in positive word-of-mouth.

According to Söderlund's (2003) U shaped curve theory, dissatisfaction leads to negative word-of-mouth. The purchase or service encounter of a higher price, inconvenience for repair, or a company's inability to respond to consumers' complaints will cause consumers to spread their negative word-of-mouth (Richins, 1983). It makes sense that consumers will complain when they feel dissatisfied while they are consuming the products they bought. Once consumers' complaints have been accepted, they would hold their negative word-of-mouth if they were satisfied with the company's response, such as coupons or price-offs. If the company does not provide a good explanation or does not immediately implement a good service recovery strategy, the consumers will definitely proceed with spreading their negative word-of-mouth.

Hoffman, Jones, and Rotalsky (1995) indicated that maintaining a good customer relationship can be reinforced by a proper recovery, while a poor recovery service can cause consumers to rate firms lower after their recovery efforts than they rated the firms immediately following the failures. Therefore, Goodwin and Ross (1992) suggested that an appropriate service recovery strategy would restore customers' satisfaction and further spread positive word-of-mouth. In addition, the authors pointed out that the satisfaction level, after complaint-handling, will be higher than the previous satisfaction level. That means a proper service recovery can lead to positive word-of-mouth and further build strong customer loyalty.

The above discussion has been focusing on the issue of why and how dissatisfied customers disseminate negative word-of-mouth. The other issue, which has not received much attention, is the effect of antecedent negative word-of-mouth on consumers' attitudes toward the criticized products or services. It should be discussed because the antecedent negative word-of-mouth will influence not only the word-of-mouth receivers' attitudes toward the criticized products or services, but also their judgment over the products or service.

In the Lacznia, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami (2001) study, the authors found that consumers who are exposed to highly consistent, highly distinct, and highly consensus

negative word-of-mouth will be more likely to attribute the negativity of the message toward the product or service. It does provide a meaning that the antecedent negative word-of-mouth will have certain effects on consumers' attitudes if the message is consistent, consensus, and distinct. In addition, Lacznia et al. also indicated that consumers exposed to lower consensus, lower distinct, and lower consistent negative word-of-mouth will be more likely to attribute the negativity of the message toward the communicator.

An interest issue should be noted that while most researchers propose that customer satisfaction has a significant effect on word-of-mouth (Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi, & Katircioglu, 2005; Babin, Lee, Kim, & Griffin, 2005; Chiou et al., 2002; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Teo & Lim, 2001), Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) indicated that customer satisfaction does not directly relate to word-of-mouth communication. Nevertheless, attitudinal loyalty is a mediator connecting to both customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth. It stands to reason that when a company provides a consumer with a satisfied purchasing experience, this can contribute to his/her attitudinal loyalty (i.e., repurchase intention), and in turn, attitudinal loyalty can engage consumers into the generation of word-of-mouth about the company.

## **2.4 Development of the Hypotheses**

Multiple studies have pointed out that both repurchase intention and word-of-mouth serve as the consequence of customer satisfaction, and can be predicted by several measurements of customer satisfaction (Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005; Chiou et al., 2002; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). Although a direct effect was pointed out between word-of-mouth and satisfaction in the literature (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; File & Prince, 1992; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Swan & Oliver, 1989), Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) asserted that word-of-mouth is not directly influenced by satisfaction. Instead, word-of-mouth is said to be influenced by repurchase intention, followed by being influenced by satisfaction. Thus, this dissertation explored whether repurchase intention serves as a mediating role in the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth. The hypotheses are showed as follows:

H1-1o: There is no significant relationship between service/product/ambiance satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1a: A significantly positive effect exists between service satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1b: A significantly positive effect exists between product satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-1c: A significantly positive effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and repurchase intention.

H1-2o: There is no significant relationship between service/product/ambiance satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2a: A significantly positive effect exists between service satisfaction and positive

word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2b: A significantly positive effect exists between product satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2c: A significantly positive effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2d: A significantly negative effect exists between service satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2e: A significantly negative effect exists between product satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-2f: A significantly negative effect exists between ambiance satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3o: There is no significant relationship between repurchase intention and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3a: A significantly positive effect exists between repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth output intention.

H1-3b: A significantly negative effect exists between repurchase intention and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

### **3. Methodology**

This research studies that whether consumer satisfaction directly affect consumer word-of-mouth behavior or repurchase intention can play a mediating role between consumer satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention. With several experiments used in this quantitative research, questionnaires were distributed to obtain desired data. The fundamental objective of this research was to investigate whether repurchase intention can play a mediating role in the relationship between their satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention.

#### **3.1 Selection of Participants**

The participants targeted by this study were the existing customers who were patronizing hot pot restaurants. The reason this study employed hot pot as the targeted product is because the hot pot restaurants are growing faster than ever, according to *Min Sheng Daily*, and are producing approximately US\$ 1 billion sales a year (source from Gigu Chain of Hokkaido Kambu Hot Pot Restaurant's website, <http://www.gigu.com.tw/news.htm>). Thus, the researcher selected a famous hot pot restaurant chain, which is called *Lemon Grass Hot Pot Restaurant* in Taiwan for this study (restaurant's website <http://www.lemon-grass.com.tw>). There are four restaurants under this restaurant chain. The author of this study selected all four restaurants, and the restaurant managers helped the author to distribute questionnaires to the consumers. Prior education of how to administer a desired surveying activity was

delivered to those managers in order to maintain consistency in the manipulation of collecting data. This surveying activity took place during lunch and dinner, and lasted for a week. Respondents were approached as they finished their meals, but before they left their table, and were informed that the survey was for educational purposes, and that their response would be completely anonymous. This approach was validated in the Babin's et al. (2005) study, where the survey was also undertaken in a restaurant setting. Three-hundred questionnaires were projected as needed to achieve the desired amount of the sampling size.

Since the study employed factor analysis as one of the major statistical methods to analyze the data, the number of 300 as a sample size was sufficient to meet the requirement of sample size in factor analysis. As Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) indicated, the minimum ratio of ten samples, or a 20-to-1 variable are required to validate the derived factors in order to assess whether the results have practical significance.

### **3.2 Instrumentation**

Five marketing professionals were solicited to verify whether the question items were clear and represented the meaning of the variables, and to assure the questionnaire was being well developed. In addition, because this study was conducted in Taiwan, it was necessary to translate forward and backward between English and Chinese for the accommodation of Taiwanese respondents. Hence, in order to validate the translation, the survey translation was verified by two experts who are familiar with bilingual translation. One of them was responsible for the translation from English to Chinese, while the other one was responsible for the translation from Chinese to English.

The questionnaire started with a greeting to appreciate the respondents' participations followed by measurement of satisfactions, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth output. In terms of satisfaction, the study adopted the items employed in previous literatures (Lee & Hing, 1995; MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000; Stevens et al., 1995; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Swanson & Davis, 2003) to measure respondents' satisfaction toward service, product, and ambiance with a five-point Likert scale, including "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly agree." The development of measurement for these three satisfactions is as follows.

#### **3.2.1 Service Satisfaction**

According to prior studies, consumers evaluate service on the basis of staff's appearance, prompt service, helpfulness, courteousness, and knowledge (Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Lee & Hing, 1995; Stevens et al., 1995). Thus, the items were developed as: "Staff is clean, neat, and appropriately dressed," "Staff gives prompt service," "Staff is always willing to help," "Staff is polite," and "Staff has the knowledge to answer any questions."

### 3.2.2 Product Satisfaction

According to prior studies, freshness, taste, and size of the portions of food are the attributes for evaluating food quality (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Swanson & Davis, 2003). Since the targeted restaurants were the specialty restaurants selling hot pot and their famous sauce, broth, and beverage, the items were modified as: “The ingredients are fresh,” “The taste of sauce is excellent,” “The taste of broth is excellent,” “The taste of beverage is excellent,” and “The portion size is appropriate and enough.”

### 3.2.3 Ambiance Satisfaction

Ambiance satisfaction refers to consumer’s perception towards ambiance quality. Design (e.g., style, lighting, and color), comfort (e.g., temperature, noise, music, and scent), waiting area, seating arrangement, and cleanliness are the attributes for evaluating ambiance quality (Bitner, 1992; Stevens et al., 1995; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994, 1996). Thus, the items were developed as: “The décor keeps with its image and price range,” “The dining area is comfortable (i.e., temperature, noise, music, and scent),” “Waiting area is comfortable,” “Seating is well arranged,” and “Dining areas are thoroughly clean.”

### 3.2.4 Repurchase Intention

Repurchase intention was also measured with a five-point Likert scale, including: “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Neutral,” “Agree,” and “Strongly agree.” The study adopted the same items employed in Söderlund’s (2002) study: “I would like to return to this restaurant” and “I would not hesitate to come back to this restaurant again.”

### 3.2.5 Word-of-Mouth Output Intention

Word-of-mouth output intention took the same approach in the scale development as repurchase intention. In terms of positive word-of-mouth output, the items were: “I would recommend this restaurant to others,” and “If someone asks me information about this restaurant, I would recommend this one” (Söderlund, 2002). On the contrary, the items for negative word-of-mouth output were: “It is likely that I would warn others not to go to this restaurant,” and “I would complain to others about this restaurant” (Teo & Lim, 2001). Items employed for the existing customers’ motivations were the same as potential customers’.

### 3.2.6 Demographics

Demographics in this study, consisted of five items, including gender, age, monthly income, and education. Gender was measured by category content of “Male” and “Female.” Age was measured by category content of “Under 20,” “21-25,” “26-30,” “31-35,” “36-40,” and “Above 41.” Monthly income included the measurement of “Under NT\$20,000,” “NT\$20,001-NT\$30,000,” “NT\$30,001-NT\$40,000,” and “NT\$40,001-NT\$50,000,”

“NT\$50,001-NT\$60,000,” and “Above NT\$60,001.” Education involved the content of “High School or under,” “Two-year college,” “Four-year university,” and “Graduate school or above.”

### **3.3 Procedures**

As mentioned above, the researcher projected to collect at least three hundred questionnaires for each group of potential and existing customers. Since the minimum for the required sample size was based on the research method, three hundred respondents were used, because this study utilized the structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data being collected. According to Hair et al. (1998), a minimum of two hundred in the sample is recommended when using structural equation modeling.

### **3.4 Data Processing and Analysis**

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 14.0 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 6.0 statistical software were employed to analyze the data collected from the survey. In addition, this study adopted an alpha level of .05 as the level of significance. Several data analysis tools are discussed as follows.

#### **3.4.1 Descriptive Analyses**

The descriptive analysis employed numerical and graphical methods to provide clear understanding patterns for summarizing and presenting the data information (McClave, Benson, & Sincich, 2001). This statistical tool was utilized on the demographical data.

#### **3.4.2 Reliability and Validity Tests**

Reliability was assessed by the Cronbach alpha value. According to Hair et al. (1998), the threshold for the items' measurement to be considered reliable needs to be an alpha value greater than 0.7. This study addressed content validity through literature reviews to adopt instruments of previous research, and assessed construct validity using factor analysis to examine that each item loaded clearly on their intended factor and eigenvalues greater than one (Jansen, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2005).

#### **3.4.3 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**

SEM is a statistical tool providing several functions, such as confirming the underlying structure, improving statistical estimation, representing theoretical concepts, and specifying measurement error (Hair et al., 1998). In addition, it can indicate whether some variables play a mediating role between several casual and effect variables through estimating their interrelated relationships. Such a path analysis allows researchers to assess the strength of each relationship or path, and depicts the nature of cause and effect. In this study, the

hypotheses 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 were examined to see whether repurchase intention can serve as a mediating role in the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention.

Several criterion need to be considered while undertaking the SEM analysis. A model with a  $p$  value less than 0.05, a value of goodness of fit index (GFI) greater than 0.9, and a value of comparative fit index (CFI) greater than 0.9 was considered having an acceptable model fit (Hair et al., 1998). In addition, a value of root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) smaller than 0.05 was expressive of a good fit, between 0.05 and under 0.08 of a fair fit, between 0.08 and 0.10 of a mediocre fit, and greater than 0.10 of a poor fit (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Description of the Sample**

The sample for this researcher was derived from the people who were patronizing in the *Lemon Grass Hot Pot Restaurant*. It took about a week to collect the desired data, which came from 330 out of 400 questionnaires totally distributed, and produced a 82.5% response rate. Path analysis was deployed in order to measure the relationships among three types of satisfaction, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth output intention.

#### **4.1.1 Demographics Profile**

Of the 330 existing customers, gender was also highly skewed with 104 (31.5%) being males and 226 being females (68.5%). Table 1 indicates the demographic information for the subjects of interest, and presents the distribution based on gender, age, education, and income.

In the category of age, 38 customers (11.5%) were under 20 years old; 83 customers (25.2%) were 21-25 years old; 88 customers (26.7%) were 26-30 years old; 49 customers (14.8%) were 31-35 years old; 35 customers (10.6%) were 36-40 years old; and 37 customers (11.2%) were above 41 years old.

In the income category, 98 customers (29.7%) had income of less than NT\$20,000 income; 81 customers (24.5%) had income of NT\$20,001 – NT\$30,000; 69 customers (20.9%) had income of NT\$30,001 – NT\$40,000; 27 customers (8.2%) had income of NT\$40,001 – NT\$50,000; 18 customers (5.5%) had income of NT\$50,001 – NT\$60,000; and 37 customers (11.2%) had income of above NT\$60,000.

In the category of education, 77 customers (23.2%) owned a high school diploma or lower educational level, while 60 customers (18.2%) owned a two-year college degree, 149 customers (45.2%) owned a four-year university degree, and 44 customers (13.3%) had a graduate school degree.

### **4.2 Reliability Analyses**

Cronbach's alpha value was employed to measure the reliability of the instruments in

this study. Reliabilities for service satisfaction, product satisfaction and ambiance satisfaction were 0.866, 0.795, and 0.850 respectively. Reliability for repurchase intention was 0.856. Reliabilities for positive word-of-mouth output intention and negative word-of-mouth output intention were 0.899, and 0.839 respectively. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), the coefficient alpha value greater than 0.7 is considered to be acceptable. All of the constructs in this study had acceptable coefficient alpha.

### 4.3 Analyses of the Hypotheses

Hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 6.0 statistical software. The results of the hypotheses 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 tests were as follows.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the path mode inferred by the hypotheses developed above. The resulting model yielded a  $\chi^2 (175, N = 330) = 311.787, p = 0.000$ . Further, the value of goodness of fit index (GFI) at 0.917, comparative fit index (CFI) at 0.962, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) at 0.048 were all at a satisfactory level (see figure1). The individual hypotheses can be tested by considering the resulting structural path estimates. Table 1 summarizes these coefficients. The path representing the relationship between service satisfaction and repurchase intention was not significant (path estimate = 0.03,  $t = 0.47, p = 0.640$ ), but repurchase intention was predicted directly by product satisfaction (path estimate = 0.61,  $t = 7.13, p < 0.001$ ), and ambiance satisfaction (path estimate = 0.17,  $t = 2.46, p = 0.014$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis H1-1o was rejected and support was found for the alternative hypotheses H1-1b and H1-1c, meaning that there were significant positive effects between product/ambiance satisfaction and repurchase intention. However, the alternative hypothesis H1-1a was not supported in this study, which meant that there was no significant positive effect that existed between service satisfaction and repurchase intention.

Also, in the path displaying the relationship between service satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention there was no significance (path estimate = 0.08,  $t = 1.40, p = 0.162$ ; path estimate = -0.04,  $t = -0.50, p = 0.615$ ). The  $p$  values of path from product satisfaction to positive and negative word-of-mouth output intention were 0.084 and 0.692 (path estimate = 0.13 and -0.04,  $t = 1.73$  and 0.40, respectively), which meant there was no significant relationship between product satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention. In addition, there were significant relationships between ambiance satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention (path estimate = -0.12 and -0.16,  $t = -2.15$  and -2.21, and  $p = 0.031$  and 0.027, respectively). Even though the results showed that there was a significant relationship between ambiance satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention, the path estimate was negative, which did not conform to the hypothesis referring to positive effect in positive word-of-mouth output intention. This finding meant that when ambiance satisfaction goes up, positive

word-of-mouth output intention goes down. Since there is not any research or reference mentioning such phenomenon, it will be discussed in the next chapter. Consequently, the null hypothesis H1-2o was rejected and support was found for the alternative hypotheses H1-2f, which meant that there was significant negative effect between ambiance satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention. It meant that when ambiance satisfaction goes up by 1 standard deviation, negative word-of-mouth output intention goes down by 0.16 standard deviations. Nevertheless, the alternative hypothesis H1-2a was not supported, meaning that there was no significant positive effect that existed between service satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention. The alternative hypothesis H1-2b was not supported for a significant positive effect existing between product satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention. The alternative hypothesis H1-2c was not supported in this study, because there was a significant negative effect that existed between ambiance satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention. The alternative hypothesis H1-2d was not supported, which meant that there was no significant negative effect that existed between service satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention. The alternative hypothesis H1-2e was also not supported, meaning that there was no significant negative effect that existed between product satisfaction and negative word-of-mouth output intention.

In addition, repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth output intention was supported by a significant positive path coefficient (path estimate = 0.78,  $t = 10.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). For the repurchase intention and negative word-of-mouth output intention, there was a significant negative path coefficient (path estimate = -0.52,  $t = -5.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). It meant that when repurchase goes up by 1 standard deviation, positive word-of-mouth output intention also goes up by 0.78 standard deviations and negative word-of-mouth output intention goes down by 0.52 standard deviations. Thus, the null hypothesis H1-3o was rejected and support was found for the alternative hypotheses H1-3a and H1-3b, meaning that there were significant positive effects between repurchase intention and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention.

Figure 1 and Tables 2 indicate that product satisfaction, ambiance satisfaction, and repurchase intention effect repurchase intention, positive word-of-mouth output intention, and negative word-of-mouth output intention. The results show that repurchase intention was a mediating role between product satisfaction and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention. For ambiance satisfaction, it had a direct and indirect effect on positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention, which meant that repurchase intention could also play a mediating role between ambiance satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention.

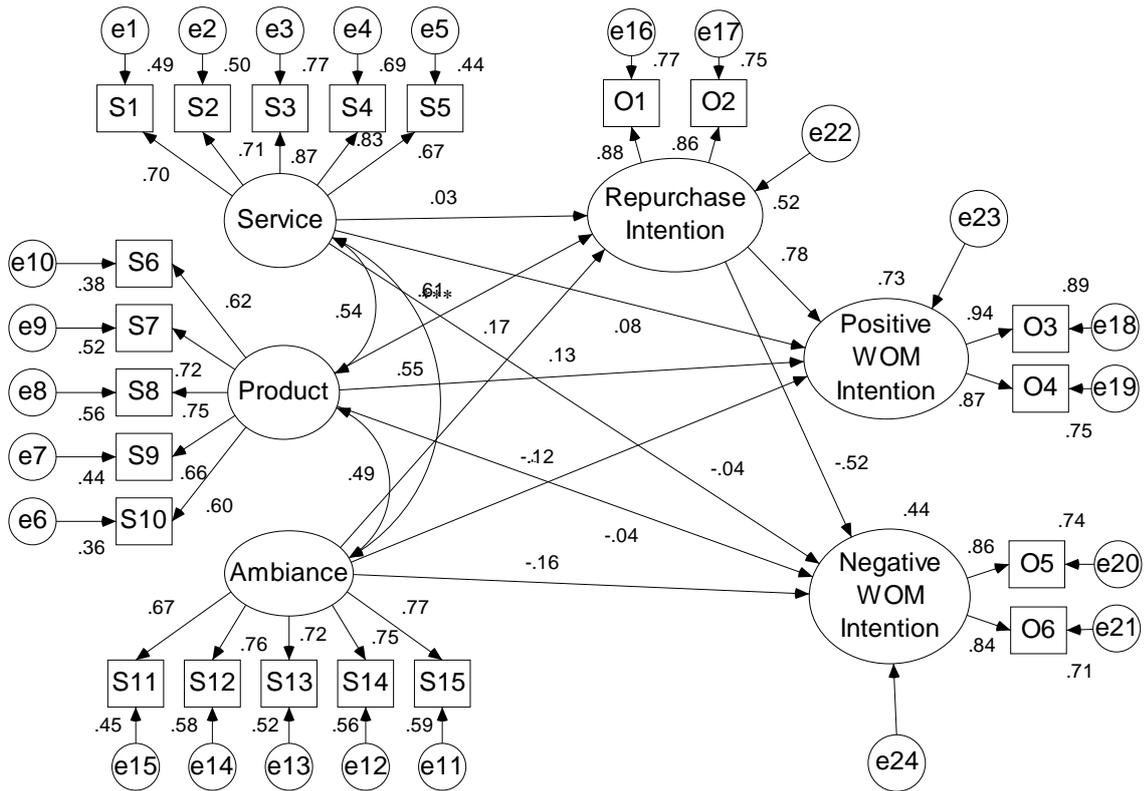


Figure 1. Structural model for path analysis.

Standardized estimates

$\chi^2/df = 1.782$  ( $\chi^2 = 311.787$ ,  $df = 175$ ),  $N = 330$

GFI = 0.918, CFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.049

WOM is the word-of-mouth

\* Correlation is significant at the <0.05 (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the <0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*\*\* Correlation is significant at the < 0.001 level (2-tailed)

Table 1  
*Results of Path Analysis*

Predictor	Dependent Variables	Estimate	t-value	p-value
Service	→ Repurchase Intention	.03	.47	.640
Service	→ Positive WOM Intention	.08	1.40	.162
Service	→ Negative WOM Intention	-.04	-.50	.615
Product	→ Repurchase Intention	.61	7.13	***
Product	→ Positive WOM Intention	.13	1.73	.084
Product	→ Negative WOM Intention	-.04	-.40	.692
Ambiance	→ Repurchase Intention	.17	2.46	.014
Ambiance	→ Positive WOM Intention	-.12	-2.15	.031
Ambiance	→ Negative WOM Intention	-.16	-2.21	.027
Repurchase Intention	→ Positive WOM Intention	.78	10.58	***
Repurchase Intention	→ Negative WOM Intention	-.52	-5.77	***

WOM is the word-of-mouth

\*\*\* Correlation is significant at the < 0.001 level (2-tailed)

Table 2  
*Standardized Direct, Indirect and Total Effect*

	Service	Product	Ambiance	Repurchase Intention
Direct Effect				
Repurchase Intention	-	.61	.17	-
Positive WOM Intention	-	-	-.12	.78
Negative WOM Intention	-	-	-.16	-.52
Indirect Effect				
Repurchase Intention	-	-	-	-
Positive WOM Intention	-	.47	.13	-
Negative WOM Intention	-	-.32	-.09	-
Total Effect				
Repurchase Intention	-	.61	.17	-
Positive WOM Intention	-	.47	.01	.78
Negative WOM Intention	-	-.32	-.25	-.52

WOM is the word-of-mouth

## **5. Conclusions**

The fourth finding proposed that service satisfaction can not predict repurchase intention and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention; product satisfaction can predict repurchase intention, and ambiance satisfaction can predict repurchase intention and positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention. In addition, there is significant effect between repurchase intention and word-of-mouth output intention, which means that the restaurant customers who have a high repurchase intention are inclined to recommend this restaurant to others rather than complain about this restaurant. These results conform to Smith's (1998) research, which stated that customer satisfaction can be a significant determinant of repurchase intention and word-of-mouth output intention. Furthermore, repurchase intention can also play a mediating role between product/ambiance satisfaction and word-of-mouth output intention. Therefore, this circumstance illustrates that customer satisfaction (e.g., product and ambiance) can directly (File & Prince, 1992; Söderlund, 2003; Wirtz & Chew, 2002) and indirectly (Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005) relate to word-of-mouth output intention.

### **5.1 Limitations**

There was one primary limitation in this research. The restaurants selected in this study were a hot pot restaurant chain in Taiwan. The hot pot restaurant is considered as a counter service restaurant, not a fine dining restaurant or full-service restaurant. Thus, the results may not be suitable for any general restaurant.

### **5.2 Implications and Recommendations**

The implication for the restaurant operators is that product (food) satisfaction is one of the primary attributes in predicting repurchase intention, and it also has an indirect effect on positive/negative word-of-mouth output intention. Ambiance satisfaction can decrease negative word-of-mouth output intention. Therefore, the restaurant operators have to provide high quality products (foods) and a good environment to satisfy their customers. In this study, service satisfaction can not predict repurchase intention and word-of-mouth output intention. This result may only apply in hot pot restaurants because the sample was limited to hot pot restaurants, which is considered as a counter service restaurant, not a fine dining restaurant. Thus, further research should employ fine dining restaurants as a sample to examine again.

Another interesting finding was that there was a significant negative effect existing between ambiance satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth output intention, meaning that when ambiance satisfaction goes up, positive word-of-mouth output intention goes down. This result seemed not making any sense, therefore, such circumstance should be investigated in further study.

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