



# WHY DO PEOPLE EAT OUT: UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF CUSTOMERS OF CASUAL DINING RESTAURANTS

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## ABSTRACT

*The following paper seeks to explore the reasons for the practice of 'eating out at casual restaurants' among urban citizens and their implications for business. The study examines how to segment diners visiting casual restaurants, using the push-pull motivation theory framework. Two main questions were addressed by this research: what is/are the motivations for people for choosing to go to a restaurant leaving the home kitchen, and what are the factors that propel such people to go to a or some particular restaurant (s) repeatedly.*

*There are utilitarian as well as hedonic factors. Among the utilitarian factors cost of food and its quantity, distance one has to travel to reach the restaurant particularly from one's place of work are important, Among the hedonic pleasure the quality of the food, the ambiance of the restaurant, the courtesy of the restaurant staff and the opportunity to meet acquaintances are crucial factors.*

**Keywords:** Hedonic Motivation. Motivation, Restaurant, Services, Utilitarian Motivation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dining at restaurants is becoming increasingly popular in India. When deciding to dine out, Indians have several alternatives, from fast food to casual, to fine dining. What draws consumers into these establishments and what drives them to dine out instead of dining at home? Consumers may draw from previous knowledge and experience while selecting a place to dine. At other times, consumers may be forced to make an active choice. Such decisions fall along a spectrum ranging from well-thought-through, complex resolutions to automated, or habitual, quickly-made decisions (Njite, Dunn, & Kim, 2008). With increasing competition in the industry, it becomes crucial for restaurants to differentiate themselves to appeal to a wide population base (Baltazar, 2011).

Various pieces of research have been conducted on the importance of restaurant attributes across different countries. According to Rydell *et al.* (2008), the most frequently cited reasons for dining at fast-food restaurants are primarily related to convenience, such as “they’re quick” and “they’re easy to get to”, along with socialization aspects. Njite *et al.* (2008), on the other hand, identified customer relations, and employee competence, supported by convenience as important factors influencing the choice of fine-dining restaurants.

In 1985, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, in their work on perceptions and measurement of service quality, identified five key dimensions (SERVQUAL) which were applied within a restaurant setting by Stevens, Knutson, and Patton in 1995, who then developed the DINESERV instrument to measure service quality in food service. These dimensions were

- Tangibles - Appearance of physical facilities, personnel, and equipment
- Reliability - Ability to perform the promised service accurately.
- Responsiveness - Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance - Knowledge, and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.
- Empathy - Caring, individualized attention to the customers.

Various pieces of research have been conducted that examine different restaurant attributes though not many published works of literature are available on the topic, especially in the Indian context. This is especially true for the casual dining sector. Furthermore, many constructs from the consumer behaviour literature which are often used in the field of tourism, have rarely been applied to studying restaurant consumers.

The current study addresses itself to some of the gaps in the literature. In this study, the food environment is explored through multiple perspectives to understand how people choose to eat out. The study explores the different reasons which drive people to choose to eat outside home.

Some reasons cited for this choice are

- trying new and different foods/cuisines
- establishing and maintaining social connections
- change from routine
- lack of confidence in their ability to prepare certain foods

Through the exploration process, several other reasons were cited to describe the relationship that people have with eating out at restaurants. From the findings of the research to understand the reasons people went out to eat, it is evident that restaurants occupy an important cultural place in modern Indian society.

The purpose of this study is to examine how to segment diners visiting casual restaurants, using the push-pull motivation theory framework, and understand their impacts on consumer experience outcomes.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1. Reasons for Eating Out

As per Stewart, Luoma, Schlekat, Doblin & Hieb (2004), eating out is oftentimes considered a leisure activity. The reason one chooses to eat out may be due to physiological/biological needs, social needs, esteem/psychological needs, convenience, business needs, and health reasons (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Edwards, 2000; Jones, 2002; Keller, 2007; Warde & Martens, 2000; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). There are additional reasons like culture/tradition and impulse. The decision theory by Hansson, (1994) also mentions these reasons while analysing willpower that a person shows in terms of what to eat and why.

Hitti (2008) observed in his study that most people (92.3%) ate out for reasons of convenience during lunch time whilst 33.1% ate dinner out for social reasons. Warde and Martens (2000), on the other hand, theorized that eating out is driven by the need for pleasure and leisure along with necessity, each of which is closely linked to meeting esteem, social and physiological needs.

## 2.2. Restaurant and food attributes

Depending on the motivations, factors that affect consumers' decision process when selecting a restaurant for dining out vary. (Choi & Zhao, 2010). Consumer preferences and decisions to purchase products and/or services is dependent on a range of factors which includes factors like the physical environment where the potential transaction is to take place (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010).

Park (2004) theorizes that consumers weigh the overall value of an offering vis-à-vis the importance of a factor and the degree to which the factor is present (attribute-value theory).

Namkung and Jang (2007) applying the same theory to food attributes, found there is no consensus on the order of attributes that constitute a food item's quality. Harrington *et al.* (2011) determined that food appeal relates to aspects such as taste, presentation, temperature, and portion size. Food safety has been emphasized significantly in previous research. Consumers' perception of. Food safety is particularly important for restaurant guests, as the perception of poor hygiene and safety practices may result in the loss of customers to restaurants that consumers considered safer (Harrington *et al.*, 2011). A significant challenge facing the restaurant industry is to provide quality food that is not only compelling for the customers but also superior to business competitors (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

## 2.3. Consumer evaluation of dining experiences

The evaluation of the consumers' dining experiences has also been found to play an important role in their decision to eat out at a restaurant or within the comfort of their house. Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) developed the DINESERV instrument to live service quality in food service. DINESERV is based on the principles of the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985). These studies have shown that consumers' perceptions of the service quality experience are determined both by the physical attributes of the restaurant and the food, and the intangible aspects of service like empathy, and assurance. Kim, Jeon, and Sunghyup (2012) found that when consumers consider a group of restaurants in their minds; they unconsciously consider which restaurant can have a positive impact on their quality of life.

Once the choice to go to a specific restaurant is formed, the worth of the experience likely to be derived is additionally judged by employing a combination of tangible and intangible factors (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010). People constantly look for comfort and quality coupled with an enjoyable environment when considering options for dining out, (Choi & Zhao, 2010). Harrington *et al.* (2011) found restaurant customers often make dine-out decisions by simultaneously evaluating several criteria. Customers might consider food quality, price, and promotions, among desired features. Arguably, the value-for-money aspect of food and service components affects the dining experience also (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010). It is important to note that word of mouth remains consumers' top source for creating a restaurant choice (Batty *et al.*, 2012).

## 2.4. Repeat and referral patronage - Loyalty

Diners have a wide variety in terms of restaurant choices due to the high competition. (Harrington et al., 2011). To be successful in this business environment, restaurant operators should understand what motivates patrons to choose one restaurant over another (Batty *et al.*, 2012). Harrington et al. (2011) believe that restaurant managers need to understand customer preferences so that these expectations can be integrated into their product and service attributes.

As per Yoon & Jung (2012), customer satisfaction is one of the most important antecedent factors that leads to loyalty. Research on this topic suggests it is easier for a restaurant to generate sales from repeat customers than it is to attract new ones. Due to the importance attached to repeat visits from customers to the success of full-service restaurants, restaurant operators must appeal to those dining out frequently. Frequent diners or full-service customers have been classified by Batty et al. (2012) as those who dine out at a full-service restaurant more than once a week on average. These frequent diners ultimately form the core customer base both in good times and bad. Namkung and Jang (2007) reported that certain behaviour signals that customers are bonding with a company. This behaviour can be a simple gesture such as leaving a server a significant tip or complimenting a restaurant's chef. Mattila (2001) highlighted those attracting diners by awarding them points or gifts and expecting them to be loyal is short-sighted and counterproductive. Mattila (2001) found that loyalty is driven by attitudinal, emotional, and behavioural aspects which are indicators of how consumers define their engagement levels with a restaurant.

## 2.5. Involvement

Zaichkowsky (1985) defined Involvement as a “person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests”.

Engagement and involvement levels have a significant influence on consumer decision-making and are important elements used for defining and assessing different dimensions of a product or service (Chang, Burns, & Francis, 2004; Cohen & Goldberg, 1970). Involvement has been described by Brennan & Mavondo, (2000) as “a motivational and goal-directed emotional state that determines the personal relevance of a purchase decision to a buyer”. Involvement has been classified into three distinct categories by Zaichkowsky (1985), namely, personal, physical, and situational. Peters (2005), on the other hand, believed that involvement is better conceived as a function of a subject, an object, and a situation. He considered involvement to be the reflex of strong motivation resulting from perceived relevance to self, concerning a product or service.

Other researchers have broken down involvement levels into high, medium, and low (Josiam *et al.*, 2004; Kinley *et al.*, 2010). For example, Kinard and Capella (2006) advocated that highly involved consumers perceive greater benefits than less involved consumers across service types. They also suggested that consumers perceive greater relational benefits when engaged in a relationship with high contact, customized service versus more standardized service with moderate contact.

Tourism industry is one of the key sectors where the involvement construct has been extensively studied. (Clements & Josiam, 1995; Josiam, Huang, Bahulkar, Spears & Kennon, 2012; Josiam et al., 2004; Josiam, Smeaton, & Clements, 1999; Kinley, Josiam, & Lockett, 2010).

Much other research has studied involvement across a broad range of segments within the hospitality and tourism industries. Clements and Josiam (1995) suggested that students who are highly involved tend to travel more over spring break than students having low involvement. Research to understand the relation between variety-seeking eating behaviour and involvement levels was undertaken by Beldona et al. (2010).

The research found that consumers who were highly involved were more likely to be categorised as authenticity seekers. They were more aware and engaged with the experience. The low involvement consumers, on the other hand, could be described as those unwilling to take risks, and also lacking curiosity. Leach (2010) used the involvement construct to measure customer involvement in food hygiene.

Although studies have been conducted using the involvement construct in the food and beverage sector of the hospitality industry, few studies have measured consumer involvement with dining or the impact of involvement on diner motivations, in the Indian context.

## 2.6. Push and Pull motivators

Since the initial days of tourism research, studies have focused on exploring the reasons for travel (Devesa *et al.*, 2010). Some studies have pointed out that motivation is useful to explain tourist behaviour and can also contribute to predicting their revisit and recommend intention (Chang *et al.*, 2014; Gnoth, 1997). As per Meng *et al.*, (2008), tourist motivation is an amalgamation of needs and wants that affect one's preference for visiting any destination.

Many theories have been used to explain motivation, but the most applied one is the push-pull theory, first defined by Crompton (1979), to analyze the process behind the decision to visit a specific destination (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003; Sangpikul, 2008) and explain tourist travel behaviour (Nowacki, 2009; Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2013).

As a psychological motivation, a push motivator is described as a predisposition to an event, such as dining out or traveling, while a pull motivator is an external attractor to a destination (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). Though not independent of each other, push and pull motivators are two separate decisions, made unconsciously or consciously in sequential stages. A consumer is pushed to act by an internal need and is then pulled to a location by external resources (Kim, 2006). In other words, push motivation represents what 'travellers seek' when visiting a destination, while pull motivation represents what 'destination offers' to satisfy tourists' wants (Prebensen *et al.*, 2013).

The push-pull framework has frequently been used in tourism research but some research has used the theory in the foodservice/restaurant literature as a means of analysing motivations for dining out. Adapting the push-pull framework to use within the restaurant industry, this study attempts to identify the important push and pull motivators acting on consumers when deciding where to dine, in the Indian context.

## 2.7 Hedonic vs. Utilitarian Construct

A person, when faced with a decision-making situation, makes a choice based on feelings or facts, in other words, hedonic or utilitarian motives (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Sarkar (2011) classified utilitarian attributes as those that emanate from a person's logical side of the mind or that part of the brain that tends to rationalize things. Hedonic attributes, on the other hand, are those that result from the feelings and emotions of an individual. Research has been conducted, across different industries, to separate motivations into utilitarian and hedonic (Cardoso & Pinto, 2010; Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Allard, Babin, & Chebat, 2009; Carpenter & Moore, 2009; Kang & Park-Poaps, 2010).

Utilitarian products are effective, functional, necessary, and practical while hedonic products are fun, exciting, delightful, thrilling, and enjoyable (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Voss *et al.*, 2003). People dine out because they derive benefits from the food they eat as well as the restaurant they visit (Park, 2004). Different utilitarian motives have been identified that drive patrons to dine out at restaurants.



Some of these motives are efficiency, taste, socialization, health, the external environment, economic factors, and entertainment (Park, 2004; Choi & Zhao, 2010). When eating out at a casual restaurant, factors that negatively affect the patrons are exhaustion, being pressed for time, or being already out (Epter, 2009).

Hedonic value is considered to be more subjective than utilitarian (Baek, 2009; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). As per Spangenberg, Voss, & Crowley, (1997), an additional aspect of hedonic value is that they are unique to the consumer, can often have symbolic meanings, and can lead to increased emotional arousal. Along similar lines, Dhar & Wertenbroch (2000), Kazakevičiūtė & Banytė (2013), and Kim & Han (2011) defined hedonic as “experiential consumption, consumed for fun, pleasure, and excitement”. Utilitarianism is the opposite and is seen as “functional”. Hedonic value, they postulated, can also be accomplished without purchasing a product or going through the buying process (Kazakevičiūtė & Banytė, 2013; Kim & Han, 2011).

According to Ha and Jang (2010), restaurant customers may have very different dining out motivations, some of which would be attributes like social life, enjoyment, flavorful experience, and economics. Diners often connect the utilitarian value by evaluating food or service quality with the amount spent on food and facilities. One of the other utilitarian values associated with eating out is also that it is more affordable than cooking a meal at home (Brown, 2018; Dagevos & Ophem, 2013). Additionally, in restaurants, customers may have a sense of excitement, pleasure, and an experience that is more important than just eating out (Brown, 2018, Kuang et al., 2012). Therefore, both hedonic and utilitarian motivations are important motivations to diners. Mattila (2001) pointed out that while customers certainly value good food; they also place a high value on emotional and social benefits.

### **3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH MODEL**

This study seeks to identify various factors that influence consumer decisions on dining out using the involvement construct as a framework. Along with this construct, the study adapts the push-pull motivation theory as well as hedonic-utilitarian principles to investigate what pushes consumers to dine out of home and what pulls patrons to the restaurant where they ultimately dine. The research also considers how restaurant characteristics determine where consumers visit, and how involvement levels influence diner loyalty and revisit intentions. While there is a wide gamut of restaurants to choose from, diners can ultimately only dine at one location.

Previously, Choi and Zhao (2010) researched patrons’ choices of restaurants based on pull factors. The methodology adopted for this study uses some aspects of Choi and Zhao’s 2010 research along with those of Njite, et al., (2008); Narine & Badrie, (2007); Yamanaka, Almanza, Nelson & DeVaney, (2003) to examine factors that push and/or pulls diners to casual dining restaurants.

To this research, ‘casual restaurant’ has been defined as a restaurant in which moderately priced food is served in a casual atmosphere with table service.

The objectives for this study are to:

1. Recognize the level of involvement with dining in a casual restaurant.
2. Investigate the relationship between diner involvement levels and
  - Demographic attributes.
  - Frequency of dining out.

3. Distinguish consumer motivators for dining at casual restaurants.
  1. Identify Classify motivators as Push or Pull
  2. Categorize motivators as Hedonic or Utilitarian
4. Evaluate casual diner involvement segments concerning push/pull motivators, hedonic/utilitarian motivators, and experience outcome variables.
5. Examine the role of involvement and motivators on diner loyalty.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Sample and data collection

The diners were surveyed during lunch hour as well as dinner time. Diners were approached and asked for their participation after their food order was placed. The locations for the research were selected on the basis of their popularity within the city of Kolkata. To mitigate the shortcoming of the convenience-sampling method, a large sample of 600 was targeted and achieved.

### 4.2. Instrument

The involvement construct was measured using a 10-point bipolar scale adapted by Josiam *et al.* (2004). This scale was originally constructed by Zaichkowsky (1985) with 20 bipolar scaled questions. In use by Josiam *et al.* (2004) was a seven-point scale. This research converted it into a five-point scale to fit with other scales used within the survey

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of involvement as a diner for a casual restaurant for each of the 10 items on a five-point scale, in which (1) indicated the lowest level of involvement and (5) indicated the highest level of involvement. To calculate every one's involvement score, all responses were summed up and a mean was then calculated.

Push motivators reflect consumers' motivations for dining out. Using a five-point scale ranging from 'never' to 'always', respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for choosing to dine out. Since no prior exploratory research was conducted, push motivators used were adapted from studies conducted by Epter (2009), Cullen (2004), and Warde *et al.* (2000).

Pull motivators indicate the respondents' motivations for choosing and eating at a specific restaurant. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of 22 attributes when selecting a casual dining restaurant to dine at. The scale used was also a five-point scale. Pull motivators used for the research were influenced by various studies, including by Harrington *et al.* (2010; 2011), Choi and Zhao (2010), Yamanaka *et al.* (2003), Vimal Chandra Verma and Devashish Das Gupta (2018).

Experience outcomes were also analysed and participants were asked four questions to their reactions to restaurant experiences. They were to rate each attribute on a five-point scale that ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' This section included questions regarding loyalty and revisit intentions.

## 5. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Information was collected from 600 participants for the research. Participation was consciously split equally among men and women, to ensure the lowered risk of bias.

**TABLE 1:** Demographic profile of participants

<b>Base : 600</b>		<b>Number (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	300	50
	Female	300	50
<i>Age</i>	18-25 years old	298	50
	26-35 years old	113	19
	36-55 years old	109	18
	56+ years old	80	13
<i>Working Status</i>	Working	248	41
	Student	352	59

The target market for casual restaurants is approximately 18 to 54 years old (Barry, Blankenstein, Britz, & Zuchowicz, 1998; Brooks, 2011). Matching that with the family life cycles that impact consumer behavior (Murphy & Staples, 1979; Lansing & Kish, 1957), age representation was sought from four categorical brackets, roughly coordinating with family life stages.

The majority of the participants were students and therefore ‘non-working’. ‘Working’ participants were defined as those who are employed either full-time or part-time as per the GOI employment guidelines. It is important to note here that the demographic split as represented in this research may not strictly adhere to the general population of the country.

## 6. RESULTS

*Objective 1: To recognize the level of involvement with dining in a casual restaurant.*

**TABLE 2.** Casual Dining Involvement Levels

<b>Base : 600</b>		
Low involvement	Medium Involvement	High Involvement
1.00-2.33	2.34-3.66	3.67-5.00
13.7%	57.7%	28.6%

Where,

- Mean Involvement Score = 3.25
- Median Involvement Score = 3.30
- Modal Involvement Score = 3.00
- Reliability = 0.907

The ten-point involvement scale used for this research is derived from the one used by Josiam et al. (2004). That research dealt with the involvement levels of the tourist shoppers. This involvement scale is an adaptation of Zaichkowsky’s 20-item involvement scale published in 1985.



To calculate the reliability of the scale, Cronbach’s alpha was used in this study. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency or a measure of how closely a set of items are related as a group. It is a measure of scale reliability wherein a high level of alpha means that the items in the test are highly correlated. The reliability of the original Zaichkowsky scale was reported at 0.95. The reliability of the current scale was calculated to be 0.912. Though lower than the original, the reliability score is high and therefore taken ahead for the research.

The mean involvement scores were divided into three categories:

- low (score of 1.0–2.33)
- medium (2.34-3.66)
- high (3.67-5.0)

More than 55% of the participants got classified as medium-involvement diners. Less than 30% were categorised as high-involvement diners.

*Objective 2: Investigate the relationship between diner involvement levels and Demographic attributes.*

Frequency of dining out.

A chi-square test was run on the crosstabs of the diner involvement segments and demographic parameters (Table 3). This was done to determine whether there is a significant difference observed in involvement levels based on demographic factors.

**TABLE 3.** Demographic Characteristics vis à vis Involvement Level

	Segments by Involvement Levels			Chi-Square
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	
Gender				8.720*
Male	26.4	38.3	26.1	
Female	73.6	61.7	73.9	
Age				6.079 (NS)
18-25 yrs	50.9	50.4	53.7	
26-35 yrs	22.6	20.8	12.8	
36-55 yrs	13.2	17	20.1	
56+ yrs	13.2	11.7	13.4	
Level of Education				1.039 (NS)
Working	65.0	66.0	65.3	
Student	35.0	34.0	34.7	

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ ; NS = no significant difference between categories

No significant differences were found between involvement levels by age or working status. However, a significant difference was seen between men and women vis-a-vis involvement levels; women reported significantly higher involvement levels than men.

Correlation analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between the frequency of dining at a casual restaurant and diner involvement levels (Table 4).

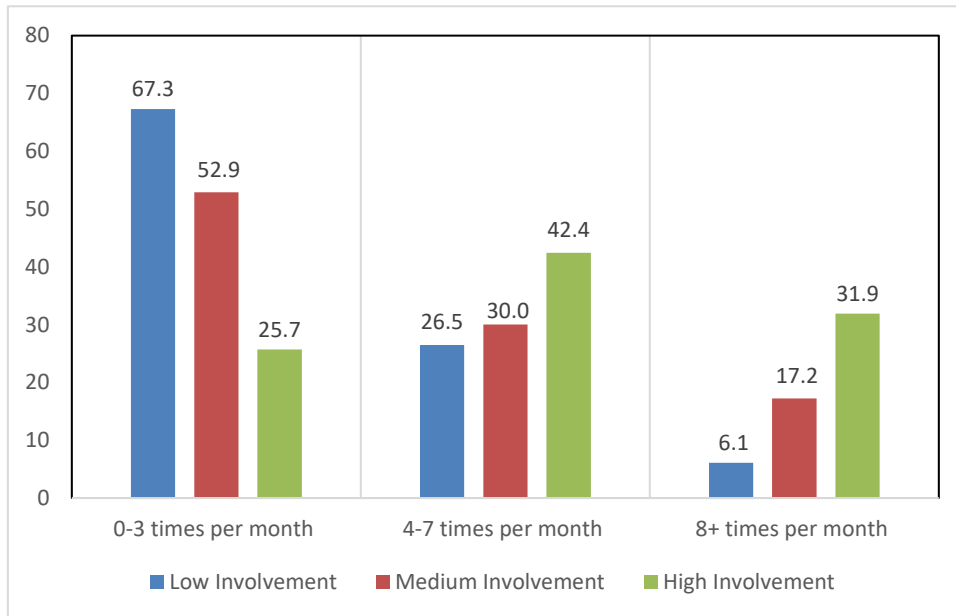
**TABLE 4.** Involvement & Dining Frequency

Segments by Involvement Levels				
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Chi-Square
Frequency of Dining Out				41.680**
0-3 times per month	67.3	52.9	25.7	
4-7 times per month	26.5	30.0	42.4	
8+ times per month	6.1	17.2	31.9	

Statistics  $r = 0.281^{**}$

\*\*Significant at  $p < .01$

**GRAPH 1 :** Frequency of Dining Out vis à vis Involvement Level



Significant positive correlation between diner involvement levels and frequency of dining out was established. Additionally, crosstabs along with chi-square was used to determine if there were differences between involvement levels and frequency of dining out (Table 4). Significant differences were found in the involvement levels and frequency of dining out at casual restaurants (Graph 1).

Each analysis indicates that that high involvement diners eat out at casual dining restaurants more frequently than low involvement diners.

Objective 3: To distinguish consumer motivators for dining at casual restaurants.

- *Classify motivators as Push or Pull*
- *Categorize motivators as Hedonic or Utilitarian*

To identify groups for the of the nine push motivators and the 23 pull motivators, factor analysis was run. Each of the factors were then named with titles reflecting their central concepts.

From the nine push motivators, two resulting factors were identified - “Kitchen Challenged Diner” and “Socially Bonded”. (Table 5)

“Kitchen Challenged Diner” Those who are unwilling or are unable to cook have been classified as Kitchen Challenged Diner. These are people who are not eager to put effort into any of the aspects associated with cooking, including but not limited to learning recipes, preparing, or washing dishes. They do not want to cook and claim they do not enjoy cooking. Therefore, they dine out to avoid cooking. They feel ‘pushed’ to dine out.

All items in this factor are utilitarian in nature, pertaining to practical or objective issues.

“Socially Bonded” - These people eat out for social reasons like accompany friends or family, or to celebrate a special occasion. They are “pushed” to dine out to satisfy social obligations. When they crave for something specific, they are willing to convince their friends and family to accompany them out the same.

All items clubbed under this factor are hedonic in nature, pertaining to enjoyment or celebration.

**TABLE 5.** Factor Analysis - Push Motivators & Relationship with Involvement Levels

	Segments by Involvement Levels			
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	
Factor 1: Kitchen Challenged (Utilitarian)				
Alpha = .841; Explained Variance = 37.751				
I do not know many recipes	1.55	1.82	1.97	3.006*
I do not know how to cook	1.57	1.60	1.80	2.415 (NS)
I do not like to cook	1.71	2.00	2.26	4.749**
I feel cooking requires too much effort	2.20	2.46	2.7	4.457*
I do not have the utensils to cook	1.68	1.8	1.95	1.939 (NS)
I do not like cleaning up and washing dishes afterwards	1.94	2.44	2.55	3.973*
Factor 2: Socially Bonded (Hedonic)				
Alpha = .548; Explained Variance = 18.470				
My friends like to eat out	3.25	3.29	3.51	3.961*
There is a special occasion	3.35	3.59	4.04	14.355**
I crave for a specific type of food	2.69	3.06	3.34	9.223**

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; NS = not significant

Factorizing process on the 22 pull motivators, gave rise to six factors - “Service Quality”, “Ambience”, “Value”, “Social Setting”, “Sanitation and Hygiene” and “Suitability” (Table 6). “Service Quality.” Diners prefer visiting restaurants that offer consistent service from well trained, knowledgeable, and competent staff.

The attributes that comprise this factor are utilitarian. These are also the same five dimensions of service quality identified in the original SERVQUAL study by Parasuraman et al. (1988) which was then utilized in the DINESERV study by Stevens et al. (1995).

“Ambience.” Ambience of a restaurant is indicative of a place that has a good feel, including proper lighting, acceptable music, well designed interior, and overall atmosphere.

The attributes in this factor are all hedonic in nature.

“Value.” Diners are attracted to restaurant where they feel they get more money worth. This is not about lower price of food items only, but a combination of price and portion size.

These attributes are utilitarian in nature.

“Social Setting” Diners are pulled to a restaurant which they have heard about in favourable terms. They may have heard others talking about it and they are attracted by the prices and variety. Important to note that these attributes are hedonic in nature.

“Sanitation and Hygiene” Diners are pulled in by a clean environment, which helps ensure that the food is safe to eat. The view of a well-maintained kitchen often helps in this image.

All attributes in this factor are utilitarian.

“Suitability” People oftentimes prefer to visit restaurants that are close by or easy to get to. Availability of certain types of food that they seek at that point also impacts.

These attributes are utilitarian in nature.

**TABLE 6.** Factor Analysis - Pull Motivators & Relationship with Involvement Levels

	Segments by Involvement Levels			
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	F-values
<b>Factor 1: Service Quality (Utilitarian)</b>				
Alpha = .893; variance explained = 16.320%				
Service is consistent	4.27	4.18	4.31	0.955 (NS)
Staff is well-trained	4.15	4.28	4.20	0.816 (NS)
Service is prompt	4.28	4.28	4.18	1.275 (NS)
Staff is competent and knowledgeable	3.73	3.86	3.94	1.856 (NS)
Service I receive	4.27	4.42	4.43	1.713 (NS)
<b>Factor 2: Ambience (Hedonic)</b>				
Alpha = .807; variance explained = 12.05%				
Interior design including seating, wall decor	2.72	2.65	2.81	3.774 *
Lighting	2.87	2.76	2.85	0.604 (NS)
Atmosphere	3.36	3.44	3.54	1.759 (NS)
Background Music	2.54	2.62	2.65	0.811 (NS)
<b>Factor 3: Value (Utilitarian)</b>				
Alpha = .597; variance explained = 9.91%				
Portion size / Amount	2.85	3.09	3.27	4.145*
Value I receive / value for money	3.96	3.85	4.07	3.765*
Price of food	3.87	3.79	4.21	2.627 (NS)
Price of beverages	1.79	2.09	2.33	5.101**
Promotions available	2.36	2.53	2.8	3.682*
<b>Factor 4: Social Setting (Hedonic)</b>				
Alpha = .639; variance explained = 8.91%				
Friends want to go	3.43	3.35	3.65	5.864**
People talk about it	3.00	2.81	3.34	8.012**
Types of beverages available	2.45	2.69	2.95	4.761**
<b>Factor 5: Sanitation and Hygiene (Utilitarian)</b>				
Alpha = .746; variance explained = 7.19%				
Food is safe	4.32	4.50	4.59	2.399 (NS)
Restaurant is clean	4.32	4.42	4.49	1.269 (NS)
<b>Factor 6: Suitability (Utilitarian)</b>				
Alpha = .185; variance explained = 5.097%				
Location of restaurant	3.51	3.46	3.93	3.230*
Food type/selection	4.15	4.12	4.33	4.551*
Restaurant accommodates needs	3.19	3.04	3.23	1.218 (NS)

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; NS = not significant

*Objective 4: To evaluate casual diner involvement segments with respect to push/pull motivators, hedonic/utilitarian motivators, and experience outcome variables.*

The three involvement segments were evaluated vis-à-vis the push motivators (as in Table 5), pull motivators (as in Table 6) and the outcome variables (as in Table 7). Anova was used as a tool to compare the same.

**TABLE 7.** Experience Outcomes and Involvement Levels

	Segments by Involvement Levels			F - Values
	Low (N=40)	Medium (N=250)	High (N=143)	
If I like a restaurant, I am loyal	3.93	4.25	4.52	9.263**
I try new restaurants and rarely return	2.64	2.76	2.81	0.596 (NS)
If I have a bad experience, I never return to that location	3.59	3.78	3.99	3.078*
If I have a bad experience, I never return to that chain	2.81	3.08	3.08	0.953 (NS)

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; NS = not significant

*Push motivators and involvement segments.*

Low involved segment scored less across all parameters that define push motivation while the highest scores were seen among the high involvement diner segment (Table 5).

For the push motivators ascribed to “Kitchen Challenged Diners”, significant differences were seen between groups across the board, except for “I do not know how to cook” and “I do not have the right equipment to cook with”. Looking at the push motivators within “Socially Bonded”, significant differences were found between groups in all three push motivator categories.

Additionally, diners classified into the high involvement category seem to be more driven by the hedonic aspects of dining out rather than the utilitarian aspects.

*Pull motivators and involvement segments.*

Unlike the push motivators, lack on unanimity within pull motivators (Table 6)

No significant variation in involvement levels observed vis-à-vis service quality as a pull factor.

Within the restaurant ambience factor, low involvement diners assign more importance to interior design than medium involvement diners.

The low involved segment attached more importance to price and value for money perception as compared to the medium involvement level segment

Word-of-mouth considered more important among the low involvement segment compared to the medium involvement segment

Low involvement diners seem to put more emphasis and value in the utilitarian aspects of dining out while the medium and high involvement diners express greater value or interest in the hedonic aspects. Moreover, the high involvement segment of diners put higher emphasis on all factors compared to the low involvement segment of diners,

Though the importance of the different factors varied among diner involvement segments, all three involvement segments regarded “Food type/selection”, “Food is safe”, “Restaurant is clean”, “Service I receive”, “Service is consistent”, “Staff is well-trained and competent”, and “Staff is prompt” as the most important pull motivators.

This suggests that diners are pulled to a restaurant because it is clean, they receive good service, and the menu offers food that the diner is seeking, rather than because they can get a good deal.

*Experience outcomes and involvement segments.*

The three involvement groups varied significantly on loyalty and revisit intention to a specific location. (Table 7). High involvement diners had the highest levels of experience outcomes across the board, and low involvement diners had the lowest levels of experience outcomes across the board. High involvement diners were more likely to remain loyal to a restaurant they enjoyed than low involvement diners. These diners were also more likely to not return to a restaurant where they had had a bad experience.

*Objective 5: To examine the role of involvement and motivators on diner loyalty.*

A regression analysis was employed to determine which factors of involvement, push motivators, and pull motivators were most important when predicting loyalty of diners (Table 8). Significant predictors of loyalty of diners were the “Service Quality” factor (Beta=.253), “Kitchen Challenged Diner” factor (Beta=.140), and “Suitability” factor (Beta= -.138). If a restaurant offers exceptional service, casual restaurant diners are more likely to remain loyal and return to a location, especially when that restaurant offers a convenient dining location and provides the dinner with what they are seeking.

**TABLE 8.** Predicting Loyalty

Factor	Beta
"Kitchen Challenged" factor	0.140**
"Service Quality" factor	0.253**
"Practicality of Restaurant" factor	-0.138**

Final statistics

$r = 0.309$ ;  $d.f = 515$ ;  $f = 17.966^{**}$ ;

$r^2 = 0.095$  \*\*Significant at  $p < .01$

**7. DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

The results of the research clearly established that the involvement levels can be an important metric for segmenting casual dining consumers. Relationships were found to exist between involvement levels; push and pull motivators, as well as hedonic and utilitarian motivators. Furthermore, it could be established through the research that loyalty can be predicted by push motivators and restaurant attributes.

An inclusive discussion in the context of the literature follows.

**7.1. Involvement scores and segments**

Most individuals surveyed fall into the medium involvement category (57.7%) while 28.6% fall within the high involvement category. Past research has suggested that decision-making vis-s-vis dining out is often moderated by involvement. The proposition is that the reason patrons dine at a specific location is dependent on the involvement levels of the diner (Cobb and Hoyer, 1995; Olsen, 2007; Tarkianinen and Sundqvist, 2005, Kim, Jeon, & Hyun, 2012).

Through the findings of this research, it can be concluded that medium involvement levels describe a typical diner. Such a diner expresses the need for food, aspirations to socialize and want some element of convenience.



Low involvement diners, though less in proportion, cite the want for socialization. Push motivators, such as “my friends want to go out to eat” or “there is a special occasion”, provide ample reasons for the low involvement group to dine out at restaurants.

## **7.2. Involvement and demographics**

No significant differences are observed between any demographic parameters when considering the involvement levels in attitude towards casual dining restaurants, except for gender. Women are, often, the buyers for the family (Barber, 2009; Josiam et al, 2004). They are responsible for as much as 80% of the daily consumer purchasing decisions and are often more informed than men. This could be one of the major contributors to the difference in involvement levels between men and women.

Little or no differences is observed in involvement levels by age or working status. This could be because the research was conducted among the core target market for casual dining restaurants.

This lack of differences is likely because pleasure is derived from dining out regardless of demographic characteristics. Consumers dine out because they enjoy the experience and/or receive some type of benefit from it, whether from a social aspect (hedonic motivation), or from a practical aspect (utilitarian motivation).

## **7.3. Why consumers dine out: involvement and push motivators**

Two key classifiers were identified through factor analysis, these being “Kitchen Challenged” diners and “Socially Bonded” diners, each a result of certain push attributes tested. Significant differences were identified between involvement levels in four of the six push motivators that drive the “Kitchen Challenged Diner”. For the “Socially Bonded”, the involvement levels were different for all three push factors.

Based on the push factors, to attract the diners classified as “Kitchen Challenged”, the promotion of convenience factors, such as speed of service, perceived value, and the ease of the ordering and paying processes is likely to be effective. Those who fall into the “Socially Bonded” category can be attracted to a restaurant through the concept of bonding occasions like happy hour, group specials, accommodating special occasions as well as proving a good environment for socialization.

## **7.4. Where consumers dine out: involvement and restaurant pull motivators**

Each involvement segment needs to be targeted separately keeping in consideration their unique characteristics. The low-involvement diners are not very strongly motivated to dine therefore identifying reasons that can attract them to a particular establishment may be difficult. On the other hand, the diners’ profiles classified under high and medium involvement segments express more interest in dining out. The challenge restaurateurs face here is how to ensure they visit a particular establishment.

All the three involvement segments attach a reasonably high level of importance to consistent service and well-trained staff at the establishment. Additionally, food safety and restaurant cleanliness/hygiene are also identified as elements important to the selection of a restaurant. A clean and well-maintained restaurant has a higher likelihood of being preferred and patronized regularly

The correlation between the involvement levels and pull motivators is evident when it comes to value perceptions. The more involved one is with dining at a casual restaurant, the more likely he is to be concerned with the position size and price of meal. This emanates from the fact that this segment of diners dine out more often than others.

The research also indicates that a well thought-out interior design scheme along with consistent service is likely to be attractive and therefore pull in the most customers.

Ensuring food safety and restaurant cleanliness is essential across all segments of customers. Aspects like unclean set-up or undercooked food result in low revisit intention thereby affecting loyalty.

### **7.5. Involvement and experience outcomes**

Involvement levels of diners come across as a significant contributor to predicting loyalty and revisit intentions. Diners who are highly involved are likely to be loyal to a casual dining restaurant. Since service quality is identified as a major pull factor, ensuring high service quality through strong training programs for staff, along with ensuring consistency and promptness will help improve revisit intention and customer loyalty.

### **7.6. Involvement and frequency of dining out**

A significant positive correlation was established between involvement levels and the frequency of dining out. As involvement levels increase, the frequency of dining out increases. Higher involvement levels generally translate into a higher interest in the activity, and those who express a greater interest in an activity tend to participate more frequently in that activity.

### **7.7. Prediction of customer loyalty**

For a casual dining restaurant, the most important pull factor was identified as ‘Service Quality’ through regression analysis. Studying the involvement levels and the various factors presented, service aspects were found to be the most important, indicating support for the findings of the regression analysis. This indicates that a high level of professionalism within the restaurant service is very important to casual dining consumers.

The most significant push factor was the “Kitchen-Challenged Diner” factor. Diners seek convenience and minimal effort to procure a meal instead of the effort for cooking and cleaning up the kitchen.

It is noteworthy that all the predictors of loyalty are utilitarian in nature. Consumers are “pushed” to dine out for practical reasons, and they seek a restaurant that can deliver on the core operational issues of good food, good service, and good value for their money. This is consistent with many previous studies on how customers evaluate restaurants.

## **8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

There is a paucity of research on the topic of diner motivations when it comes to the casual dining industry sector. The current research has established that the involvement construct can be adapted and used as a tool to segment diners visiting casual restaurants and motivations can be examined from both a push/pull framework and a hedonic/utilitarian framework. These analyses resulted in the identification of reasons why consumers dine out, and how they decide where to dine out.

This research established three involvement segments among diners – low, medium, and high – each differing in their motivation levels and depicted behaviour. Low-involvement diners are more likely to be influenced and be pushed to dine out due to utilitarian reasons, such as lack of relevant experience in the kitchen. They get attracted or pulled into casual dining restaurants that satisfy their utilitarian needs, such as convenience and location of the establishment. Hedonic purposes, on the other hand, pushed the higher involvement segments to dine out, these being purposes such as celebrations or socialization.

Similarly, they get pulled into a restaurant for hedonic reasons, such as the ambiance of the restaurant, and the items that facilitate socialization.

### **8.1. Marketing Implications**

Irrespective of the motivators that drive the different diner segments, the core operational promise of service quality, pricing, and menu selection has a significant influence on the choice of casual dining restaurants. Service is one of the most important pull factors identified among the different involvement groups - ensuring high service quality and guaranteeing consistency along with prompt service will help improve revisit intention and customer loyalty.

For casual dining restaurants to run successfully, it is important to address the motivations of diners, including the hedonic ones. Consumers of the higher involvement groups visit restaurants for hedonic purposes that includes the environment which promotes socialization and celebration. Restaurant promotional activities may effectively increase loyalty and revisit intention among these diners.

The research findings will help restaurateurs to better understand the socio-demographics of the diners along with what motivates them. Restaurateurs can better target the three involvement segments through a focus on service quality and convenience factors. Since the casual dining restaurant is often a place for enjoyment, it is important to highlight hedonic aspects that pull diners to an establishment.

### **8.2. Limitations of the study and future research**

Although many of the findings within this study are significant, the study is limited to the fact that the participants were not entirely randomly drawn. Future studies should consider a larger random sample from multiple locations to increase confidence and the ability to generalize findings to a broader population.

Additionally, involvement in casual dining is likely to differ from involvement in other restaurant segments. Thus, separate research will be required to understand the involvement levels and motivations that are effective.

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