

## FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES AND DINING EXPERIENCE AMONG RESTAURANTS IN CENTRAL LUZON REGION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF BEHAVIORAL INTENTION FRAMEWORK

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### ABSTRACT

*Food safety practices and the dining experience are among the several factors that may influence the behavioral intentions of restaurant customers. This study aimed to measure the food safety practices, customer dining experience, and behavioral intention among DOT accredited restaurants in Central Luzon. This paper also sought to determine the differences in the responses when grouped according to their demographic variables and determine the relationship between food safety practices and dining experience in the behavioral intention of customers. Descriptive and quantitative research methods were applied to determine the actual food safety practices, dining experience, and behavioral intention among 395 customers of DOT accredited independent restaurants in Central Luzon. Adapted questionnaires underwent validity and reliability tests. Weighted mean, analysis of variance, t-test, correlation matrix, and Pearson r were used as statistical tools. The findings revealed that customers are satisfied with the restaurants' food safety practices and dining experience which makes their behavioral intention likely positive. This study also found that females are more likely to spread word of mouth. Generation Y, employed customers, those who visit once a month, and those who travel alone are more satisfied with the restaurant's food safety practices and dining experience which positively affects their behavioral intention. Moreover, the study also revealed that food safety practices and dining experience have a significant relationship with behavioral intention. A behavioral intention framework was developed based on the result of the study.*

*Keywords: Food Handling, Food Quality, Generation Y, Independent restaurants, Word of Mouth*

### INTRODUCTION

The decision of the customers on what they are going to do after experiencing service in a restaurant is based on many possible factors. Restaurateurs must ensure positive post-purchase behavior because it will have a huge impact on their

image and reputation. Hence, the behavioral intention of customers should be given a premium both to delight the customers and sustain the business. Customer behavioral intention is antecedent to financial success (Taillon & Huhmann, 2019), as such, restaurants can look into factors that may affect the behavioral intention of

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Region towards the Development of Behavioral Intention Framework, pp.61 - 69*



customers such as food safety practices and dining experience.

As international tourism grows, food is becoming a more important deciding element for tourist attraction and culinary tourism offers a chance to support regional economic growth (UNWTO). In the Philippines, the Department of Tourism is focused on efforts to boost the culinary tourism of the country. In 2021, the Department started holding several gastronomic events in Central Luzon to showcase the region's rich culinary history and diversified culinary traditions (Adel, 2021). With this exposure and possible influx of customers, restaurateurs and business owners in Central Luzon can take this opportunity to improve the sales performance of the restaurants in the region through the improvement of their customer behavioral intention.

Although this may be a good opportunity for DOT accredited restaurants in the region to improve their sales, there are still hurdles that these restaurants need to address as all of them are independent restaurants. Independent restaurants are food establishments that are not associated with bigger restaurant chains and are commonly managed by the owners themselves giving them flexibility and freedom to operate the business. Given the autonomy to run the business, it was found by Chen (2018) that independent restaurants have a higher failure rate as compared to other restaurant business structures with established standards and procedures. Without established food safety practices and standard customer dining experience, it is difficult for the restaurants in the region to maintain a positive behavioral intention of customers that can directly affect their sales performance.

The compliance of casual dining regarding food safety may be determined by assessing personnel hygiene, food serving and food handling (Sarmiento & Apritado, 2022). As independent restaurants have perceived poorer food safety practices, assessing the food safety practices of restaurants in Central Luzon can help the establishments identify their weaknesses in terms of food safety and corrective action may be proposed. The dining experience covers the physical environment, food quality, and service

quality (Illo, 2020). Dining experience may be the most important factor for most customer behavioral intentions thus assessing it can help restaurants in the region to improve these aspects. Borbon et al. (2022) evaluated the tourists' behavioral intentions through the indicators of revisit intention, word of mouth, willingness to pay more, and loyalty to the attractions in the province of Batangas. Positive behavioral intention is what keeps a business going, thus the improvement of food safety practices and dining experience may result in a positive behavioral intention that can help restaurants in Central Luzon to improve their sales performance. Though several studies have already been conducted on these individual aspects, no study has yet to correlate them and assess their impact on behavioral intention. Hence, it is in these theoretical bases that the present study was founded. The output of this study may serve as guidelines to the improvement of the food safety practices and customer dining experience that may positively influence customer behavioral intentions of the restaurants in Central Luzon and may improve their sales performance. This may also serve as a guide for new restaurant owners who want to start their restaurant business. This may also be beneficial to the academe as the ideas presented may be used as reference data in conducting new research.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to measure the food safety practices, customer dining experience, and behavioral intention among DOT accredited restaurants in Central Luzon. Specifically, it aimed to 1) determine the restaurants' food safety practices in terms of personnel hygiene, food serving, and food handling; 2) assess customer dining experience in terms of the physical environment, food quality, and service quality; 3) assess behavioral intention in terms of customer revisit intention, word of mouth, willingness to pay more and loyalty; 4) test significant difference on the responses when grouped according to demographic variables; 5) test significant relationship of food safety practices, customer's dining experience, and behavioral intention; and 6)

develop behavioral intention framework based on the result of the study.

### Framework of the Study

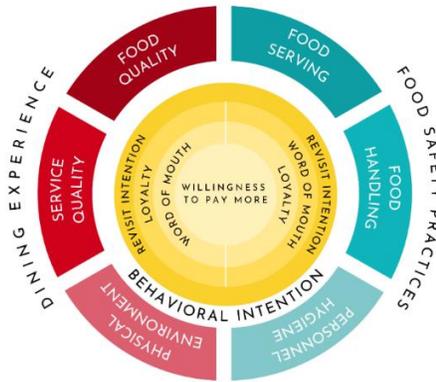


Fig 1. Restaurant Behavioral Intention Framework

The framework shows that food safety practices with the indicators of personnel hygiene, food serving and food handling, and the dining experience of customers in terms of physical environment, food quality, and service quality can affect the behavioral intention of customers with regard to revisit intention, word of mouth, willingness to pay more and loyalty.

The left side of the framework shows how the dining experience can affect the behavioral intention of customers. The dining experience used the color red as this color evokes the taste buds and stimulates the appetite of customers. Among the indicators under dining experience, food quality has the strongest influence on behavioral intention, this is shown in the framework by placing food quality on top of service quality and physical environment. It is also using a darker shade of red to indicate its significance compared to the other two sub-variables. It is followed by service quality with a shade of red and physical environment with a lighter shade of red to show hierarchy in their influence towards behavioral intention. It also shows that the dining experience has the strongest effect on revisit intention followed by loyalty, word of mouth, and willingness to pay more.

The right side of the framework on the other hand reveals the influence of food safety practices towards behavioral intention. Food safety practices

used the color green as this color represents safety. Among the indicators under food safety practices, food serving shows the strongest influence on behavioral intention and it is placed on top of food handling and personnel hygiene. It uses a darker shade of green to signify its influence to behavioral intention compared to the other two indicators. It is followed by food handling with a shade of green and personnel hygiene with a lighter shade of green to show hierarchy in their effect on behavioral intention. It is also shown that food safety practices have the strongest influence on revisit intention followed by word of mouth, loyalty, and willingness to pay more. In addition, behavioral intention used a warm color which is yellow as warmer colors evoke higher emotions such as love, passion, happiness, and anger.

The suggested model adds to the body of knowledge on behavioral intention. This framework shows the importance of food safety practices and dining experience towards customer behavioral intention thus restaurateurs and managers can use the framework of this study to improve the behavioral intention of their customers.

### METHODOLOGY

In the study, descriptive and quantitative research methods were applied to determine the actual food safety practices and dining experience of customers in restaurants in Central Luzon and its impact to behavioral intention. The participants of the study are 395 customers of the DOT accredited restaurants in Central Luzon and were surveyed through an adapted questionnaire. Respondents included in the study are customers who have dined in a DOT accredited restaurant in Central Luzon and have visited the establishment at least twice. The researcher visited the restaurants' locations and personally asked the owners, managers, and supervisors for their permission to conduct the research. The questionnaires were retrieved on the same day. After administering, the responses were tallied, tabulated, and encoded by the researcher before it was given to the statistician to analyze the gathered data. To perform data analysis, weighted mean and standard deviation were used to describe the actual food safety practices, dining experience,



and behavioral intention of customers in restaurants in Central Luzon. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test were used to assess the significant difference when the variables are grouped according to the profile of the respondents and the Correlation Matrix and Pearson r were used to determine the significant relationship between the variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Food Safety Practices, Dining Experience and Behavioral Intention in Restaurants in Central Luzon

#### 1.1. Food Safety Practices

**Table 1**  
*Food Safety Practices in Restaurants in Central Luzon*

Food Safety Practices	WM	Rank	VI
Personnel Hygiene	3.95	2	Often
Food Serving	3.89	3	Often
Food Handling	4.00	1	Often
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.95</b>		<b>Often</b>

Table 1 presents the food safety practices in restaurants in Central Luzon. The customers observed that food handling is most often practiced (4.00), followed by personnel hygiene (3.95), and food serving (3.89), and all variables were verbally interpreted as often practiced. This indicates that food safety practices in terms of food handling, personnel hygiene, and food serving are often practiced in restaurants in Central Luzon.

Food handling refers to any activity that has an effect on food including food production, preparation, packaging, storage, transportation, delivery, and sale, as well as any actions that may affect food safety and quality. As a result, a lot of people put in a lot of effort to ensure that the food we regularly eat is of sufficient hygienic quality. Food handling ranked first under food safety practices only shows the knowledge level of food handlers in Central Luzon to serve hygienically prepared food items to avoid food poisoning. There is a significant relationship in the knowledge of food handlers in performing safe food handling practices

(Ncube et al., 2020), food handlers who have satisfactory knowledge of proper food handling often practice safe food handling in their respective restaurants (Al-Kandari et al., 2019) while food establishments that have subpar food handling procedures turn food into a source of contamination (Nizame et al., 2019). The results of the study revealed that restaurants in Central Luzon often practice proper food handling techniques to avoid food contamination, keeping the health of employees and customers safe.

#### 1.2. Dining Experience

**Table 2**  
*Dining Experience in Restaurants in Central Luzon*

Dining Experience	WM	Rank	VI
Physical Environment	3.69	3	Very Good
Food Quality	3.85	1	Very Good
Service Quality	3.77	2	Very Good
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.77</b>		<b>Very Good</b>

Table 2 presents the dining experience of customers in restaurants in Central Luzon. Among the three variables, the customers are mostly pleased with food quality (3.85), followed by service quality (3.69), and physical environment (3.85), and all variables were verbally interpreted as very good. This indicates that customers of restaurants in Central Luzon have a very good dining experience in terms of food quality, service quality, and the physical environment.

Food quality is a vital need for meeting customer wants and expectations and is considered a fundamental element of the whole dining experience. This indicates why food quality ranked first among all variables under dining experience and that restaurants in Central Luzon are giving it much importance. The quality of the food has a considerable impact on satisfying the customers (Hussein et al., 2018; Zhong and Moon, 2020). Food is the primary experiential element in a customer's dining experience and the most crucial consideration when choosing a restaurant which has a strong correlation with customer satisfaction (Muskat et al., 2019). In particular, food appearance, flavor, temperature, ingredient quality,



freshness, and aroma which can all be classified under food quality were shown to have the greatest effects on customer dining experience (Hussein et al., 2018). The results found that restaurants in Central Luzon have very good food quality which affects customer satisfaction and their behavioral intention.

### 1.3. Behavioral Intention

**Table 3**  
*Behavioral Intention in Restaurants in Central Luzon*

Behavioral Intention	WM	Rank	VI
Revisit Intention	3.47	2	Moderately Agree
Word of Mouth	3.51	1	Agree
Willingness to Pay More	3.30	4	Moderately Agree
Loyalty	3.36	3	Moderately Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.41</b>		<b>Moderately Agree</b>

Table 3 presents the behavioral intentions of customers in restaurants in Central Luzon. Among the four variables, word of mouth (3.51) ranked first with a verbal interpretation of agree. This is followed by revisit intention (3.47), loyalty (3.36), and willingness to pay more (3.30) which were verbally interpreted as moderately agree. This implies that customers of restaurants in Central Luzon will spread good word of mouth about the restaurants.

Word of mouth is a free marketing strategy based on casual recommendations about a restaurant's reputation and reliability in delivering goods and services (Soleimani & Einolahzadeh, 2018). This happens when customers recommend a business's goods or services to their friends, family, and other people they are close to. Food quality and service quality affect customer word-of-mouth intentions (Muzamil et al., 2018) and in addition to this, physical environment also affects customer satisfaction that influences their word-of-mouth intention (Ali et al., 2020). It only shows that when customers are satisfied with their dining experience in a restaurant, they are likely to tell their families and friends about it, promoting the restaurant in the process. As the only sub-variable that received an interpretation of agree under

behavioral intention, we could conclude that in general, customers of restaurants in Central Luzon will recommend the restaurants to their friends and relatives which may be primarily attributed to the restaurant's dining experience.

### 2. The Difference of Responses on the Food Safety Practices, Dining Experience, and Behavioral Intention in Restaurants in Central Luzon

There are differences in the responses of customers in terms of food safety practices, dining experience, and behavioral intention when they are grouped according to their profile. It was revealed that there are significant differences in the responses in all the variables including food safety practices, dining experience, and behavioral intention and their indicators in terms of age, post hoc analysis found that Generation Y has higher scores than Generation X and Baby Boomers. The results indicate that Generation Y is more satisfied with the independent restaurants' customer food safety practices and dining experience which affects their behavioral intention as compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. It is also shown that there are no significant differences in the responses in terms of food safety practices and customer dining experience among restaurants in Central Luzon when the respondents are grouped according to sex except for behavioral intention specifically for the indicator word of mouth. It was revealed through a post hoc analysis that females have higher scores as compared to males in terms of word of mouth. This indicates that women are more likely to say positive things and recommend independent restaurants in Central Luzon as compared to men especially if it meets their expectations. There are also significant differences in the responses in all the variables when employment status is considered and it was revealed through a post hoc analysis that those who are employed have the highest means as compared to unemployed and self-employed. This means that employed customers are more satisfied with DOT accredited restaurants' food safety practices and dining experience which affects their behavioral intention as compared to unemployed



and self-employed customers. In terms of frequency of visits, it was found that there are also significant differences in the responses in all the variables except for personnel hygiene which is under food safety practices. It was revealed through a post hoc analysis that those who visit once a month have higher scores than those who visit twice a month which may indicate that those who visit once a month are more satisfied with the food safety practices and dining experience that affect their behavioral intention in DOT accredited restaurants in Central Luzon than those who visit twice a month. There are also significant differences in the responses in all the variables when the respondents are grouped according to group size except for the indicators of physical environment and food quality which are both under dining experience. It was revealed through a post hoc analysis that those who dine alone have the highest means as compared to a small group and a big group. This indicates that customers who dine alone are more satisfied with the restaurant in terms of food safety practices and dining experience aside from the physical environment and food quality aspect that affects their behavioral intention as compared to dining in groups.

### 3. The Relationship of Food Safety Practices, Dining Experience, and Behavioral Intention in Restaurants in Central Luzon

**Table 4**  
*Relationship among Food Safety Practices, Dining Experience and Behavioral Intention*

		RI	WOM	WTPM	Loyalty	Overall Mean
<b>Food Safety Practices</b>						
Personnel Hygiene	r-value	.641**	.591**	.573**	.582**	.618**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Food Serving	r-value	.735**	.714**	.697**	.703**	.738**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Food Handling	r-value	.667**	.639**	.593**	.639**	.657**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Dining Experience</b>						
Physical Environment	r-value	.678**	.649**	.653**	.663**	.685**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Food Quality	r-value	.750**	.719**	.710**	.725**	.752**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Service Quality	r-value	.743**	.720**	.668**	.729**	.741**
	p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

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

As reflected in Table 4, significant relationships exist between food safety practices

and behavioral intention as well as between dining experience and behavioral intention.

Food safety practices were found to be significantly correlated with behavioral intention and all its indicators (all p-values were <0.05). Personnel hygiene was found to be significantly related to customer behavioral intention. This means that having hygienically presentable employees positively affects the behavioral intention of customers.

Personnel hygiene encourages customers to revisit a restaurant and when employees look pleasing and tidy, it affects the perception of customers towards cleanliness as well which is why they keep on returning to that restaurant (Yang et al., 2021) and encourages them to spread the word of mouth about it (Yu et al., 2021). Part of restaurant cleanliness is employee hygiene therefore customers are willing to pay more if the staff serving them are clean (Mohaydin et al., (2017). Customers' perception of employee hygiene is also a direct predictor in developing customer loyalty (Zhang et al., 2022). Food serving was also found to be significantly correlated with customer behavioral intention. This reveals that the state of food when served and the overall cleanliness of the restaurant positively influenced the behavioral intention of customers. Cleanliness affects customer behavioral intention (Choi, 2019) and restaurant cleanliness is the most important predictor for a customer's revisit intention (Nawawi et al., 2018). While proper food temperature is a contributor to customers' intention to recommend the restaurant to others, revisit it and become loyal to it (Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020). Customers who are conscious about health in terms of cleanliness are willing to pay more if the food met their expectations with regards to cleanliness (Shin et al., 2018). Food handling was found to be significantly correlated as well with behavioral intention. This implies that proper food handling practices related to cleanliness and sanitation can influence the behavioral intention of customers. Proper food handling can influence customer behavioral intention (Mohamad et al., 2022; Liu and Lee, 2018), this indicates that customers are willing to revisit, spread word of mouth, willing to pay more and become loyal to a restaurant if they can see

that proper food handling practices are observed in the restaurant.

Dining experience was found to be significantly correlated with behavioral intention and all its sub-variables (all p-values were <0.05). Physical environment was found to be significantly related to customer behavioral intention. The physical environment is an important element for the positive behavioral intention of customers to revisit a restaurant (Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020) and it also influences their word-of-mouth behavior (Hanaysha, & Pech, 2018). While customers who are conscious about health in terms of cleanliness are willing to pay more if the physical environment is clean (Shin et al., 2018). However, another study found that the physical environment does not affect customer loyalty (Singh et al., 2021). Food quality is also found to be significantly related to behavioral intention. This implies that food presentation, taste, and freshness a major contributors to customers' behavioral intentions. Food quality positively influences customer satisfaction, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth intention (Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Musamil et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2020). While customers are also willing to pay more if there is higher food quality (Mohaydin et al., 2017) and food quality has a direct effect on customer loyalty (Suhartanto et al., 2019). Service quality was found to be significantly correlated as well with behavioral intention. This indicates that the knowledge of employees about their products and the way they treat their customers has a positive effect on customer behavioral intention. Service quality positively influences customer satisfaction, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth intention (Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020) and it also significantly influences tourist behavioral intention in general in restaurants (Mohamad et al., 2022). While customers are willing to pay more if the restaurant can provide better service for customers (Mohaydin et al., 2017) and it is also a significant predictor for both customer satisfaction and loyalty Cetin (2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

The customers are satisfied with the restaurant's food safety practices and dining experience which makes their behavioral intention

towards the restaurants of Central Luzon likely positive and they would say positive things about the restaurants to others but are only likely to revisit the restaurants, willing to pay more and to be loyal to the restaurants. Females are more likely to spread word of mouth. Generation Y, employed customers, those who visit once a month, and those who travel alone are more satisfied with the restaurant's food safety practices and dining experience which positively affects their behavioral intention. Food safety practices and dining experience significantly affect behavioral intention of customers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

DOT accredited restaurants in Central Luzon may develop products and services that target Generation Y, employed customers and those who dine alone as this profile of the respondents shows that they are more satisfied with the restaurants. Restaurateurs may use the framework of this study as a guide to continuously improve their food safety practices and dining experience to improve their customers' behavioral intentions in terms of revisit intention, word of mouth, willingness to pay more, and loyalty. The Department of Tourism may use the results of this study as a reference to improve their instrument in the accreditation of restaurants thus improving the qualifications of the DOT accredited restaurants in the region.

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