



# Predictory Effect of Food Quality on Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Research indicates that Quick Service restaurants have many opportunities to focus on aspects which will enhance their competitive advantage. Consumers enjoy visiting establishments where food quality is good as this supports the value-for-money notion. While restaurant service and the ambience generally affect a customer's behavioral intentions, it is quality food offerings that remain the critical aspect. The purpose of this study was to assess empirically the predictor Effect of food quality on Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants in Port -Harcourt. The study population comprise ten thousand (10,000) customers of registered and Operational Quick- Service Restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State; and the sample size for the study constitute three hundred and seventy customers of the restaurants which was determined using the Krejice and Morgan (1970) table. Furthermore, three hundred and seventy-two copies of structured questionnaire were distributed to customers at the respective waiting lounges and halls of the restaurants while three hundred and thirty were retrieved, cleaned and used for the study. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics while the Spearman Rank Correlation Technique was used in testing the hypothesis proposed in the study. The result of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between food quality and patronage of quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that food quality significantly affects the patronage of quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt. The researchers therefore recommended that the management of quick-service restaurants should regularly improve on their food quality in order to increase their level of customer patronage.

**Keywords:** Food quality attributes, food service industry, customer patronage, Nigeria, sustainability.

## Introduction

Globally, there is a growing demand for food away from home as a result of higher incomes, changes in consumption patterns, changes in household composition, and the time pressures created by dual working families. The food service industry has become highly competitive as the number of food service outlets has increased to meet the demand. In order to succeed in such a competitive industry, restaurant operators need to understand the factors and their relative importance that influence restaurant patrons' decision. The quick (fast food) restaurant industry is significant and growing aspect of the overall restaurant industry. In order to maintain long-term success, quick service restaurants must be perceived as offering sufficient value for customers.



In order to achieve this, restaurant management must first determine what consumers value in a quick service restaurant experience.

As the number of restaurants increase, people have many options for choosing a restaurant. A fast food restaurant is characterized as quick services of franchise restaurant chain, which supplied the food quickly after ordering the minimal service offering for dining activities. Fast food also refers to food that can be prepared and served quickly.

However, no matter how quickly a food service is delivered, if the food quality is not good enough, it will not attract the required patronage from the customers. Hence, the importance of good food quality in influencing restaurant Food patronage cannot be over emphasized. Food quality is one of the most important determinants of customer satisfaction and patronage in the restaurant industry (Ahmed, 2015). Previous studies identified food quality, service quality and ambience as major factors that determine restaurant service quality (Dutta et al, 2013; Perutkova & Paras, 2010; Ryu & Han, 2010; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). Furthermore, food quality was found to significantly affect customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions and was rated as the most important attribute influencing restaurant decisions in many studies on consumer's restaurant selection behavior (Namkung & Jang, 2007; Soriano, 2002; Sulek & Hensley, 2004).

Arguably, if customers are satisfied with food and service quality they receive in a restaurant, they will likely communicate positively about the restaurants, revisit the restaurant and subsequently contribute to the profitability of the restaurant. Quality food can in brief be described as food that is well presented, fresh and tasty. In research carried out by Namkung and Jang (2008), they identified food presentation and taste as the most influential food quality factors, whereas Ha and Jang (2012) identified food variety as the most important contributor. They further opined that those customers who perceived the quality of food they received in a restaurant as good were more inclined on spreading positive word-of-mouth and patronizing the restaurant.

Many studies have been conducted within and outside Nigeria examining service quality, and customer satisfaction constructs in different settings and perspectives. For example, the healthcare industry (Yesilada Direktor, 2010). The hotel industry (Dedeogu & Demirer, 2015) retail settings (Anselemsson & Johanssn,2014), tourism industry (Debata, Patnaik, Mahapatra, & Sree, 2015; Al-Tit & Nakhleh, 2014), the banking industry (Malik, 2012), as well as the food industry (Marinelli, Simeone & Scarpato, 2015; Wang, 2015; Ukessay, 2013; Carew, 2010; Park, 2004). The results of these studies have confirmed the significance of relationships between these constructs.

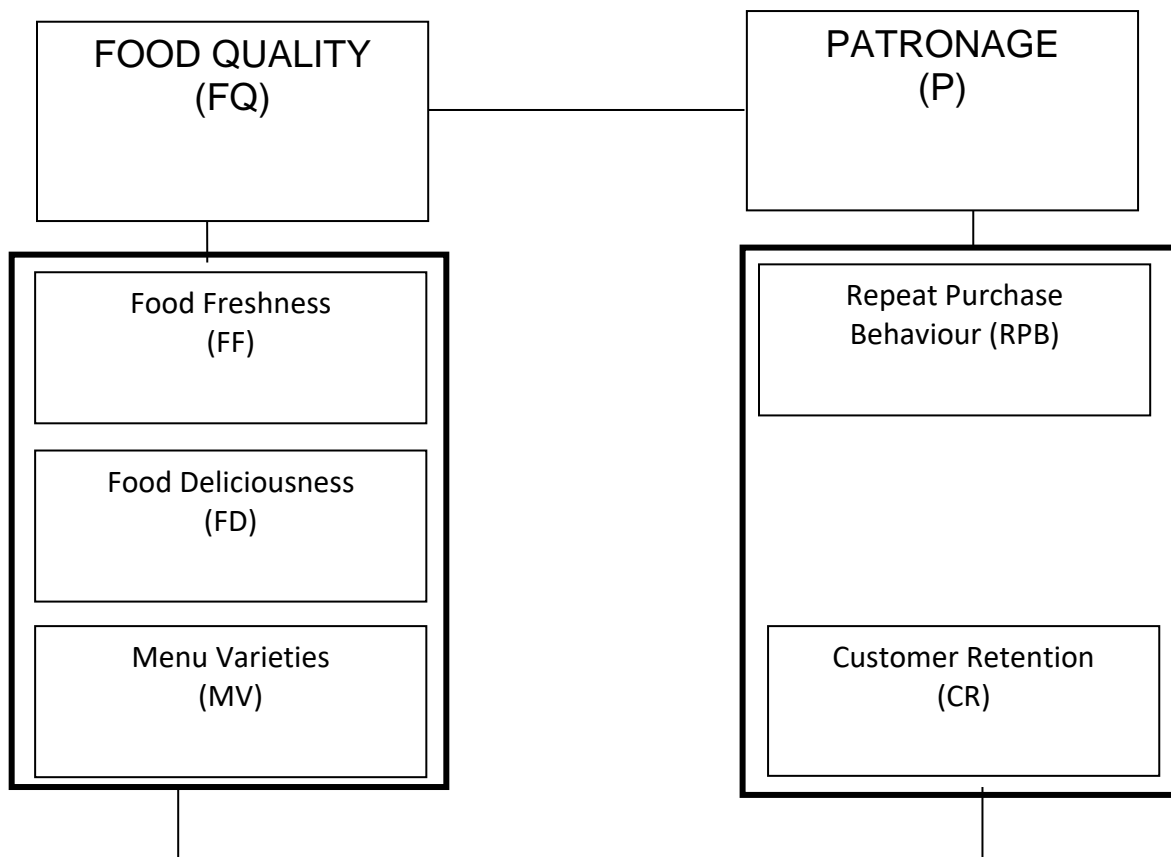
To the best of our knowledge and from the review of empirical literature it appears that there is paucity of research on the effect of food quality on patronage of quick service restaurants in the Nigerian context especially in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Against this background, this study seeks to holistically assess the effect of food quality on customer patronage of quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt and to proffer growth policy implications for the management of the quick- service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

### **Conceptualizing Food Quality / Dimensions of Food Quality**

Food is one of the most important elements leading to a quality life (Jeong & Seo, 2013). It is the main indicator of customer loyalty, and is a critical element in ascertain a restaurant's quality. Namkung and Jang (2007) opined that food quality is the most important element in dining experience. In order to be seen as having a higher quality food, a quick service restaurant needs to offer meals with fresh ingredients, reasonably high-quality meals and consistent delivery of food. More so, food quality suggests that the meals must have consistent tastes, consistent portions, and is delivered at consistent temperatures.

Furthermore, quality of food has consistently been shown as one of the core attributes that customers consider when deciding on a restaurant (Sulet & Hensley, 2004). Food quality is an essential element that restaurants must provide in order to fulfill the customer's needs (Peri, 2006). Food quality is the best important precursor to customer satisfaction, as well as being the only attribute for predicting dining behavioral intention.

However, from the foregoing discussions, it is quite evident that food quality is essential in influencing customer patronage intentions in quick service restaurants. In ascertaining what constitutes food quality or the dimensions of food quality, Namkung and Jang (2007) examined the relative factors that constitute food quality to include (Presentation, health options, taste, freshness, variety and temperature and they found that food presentation impacts the appetite of the customers and their perception of food quality). Similarly, Ryu *et al* (2011) highlighted the importance of food quality as a measure of customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry and adopted five dimensions or attributes of food quality which include: Food freshness, food deliciousness, food nutrition, menu varieties and enticing food smell. More so, Chirawan (2008) opined in his study that the elements or attributes that constitute food quality are unique tastes and ingredients, menu variety, appearance and presentation, healthy food options and familiar food. Therefore, in this study, the researchers adopted and modified food quality attributes adopted from Ryu *et al* (2011), which include food freshness, delicious food, menu varieties and enticing of smell. The dimensions of food quality adopted in this study are shown in our conceptual framework of food quality and patronage of quick service restaurants in figure1 below.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of Food Quality and Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants in Port Harcourt.  
**Source:** Researcher's Conceptualization from the review of related literature 2017



## Relationship between food quality and consumer patronage

Food quality is the single most important element that affects customers' satisfaction and repeat patronage intentions in full service restaurants. It is believed that tasty and fresh food plays an important role in the attempt to outwit the competitors, but nevertheless, food quality is one of the best means to maximize success in the restaurant business (Jang & Namkung, 2009). This finding corroborates the views of Domingo (2002) that food quality was the only factor that has a significant effect on return patronage. Furthermore, previous studies also had shown that food quality influence customer satisfaction, loyalty and patronage (Jaska & John, 1999; John & Tyas, 1999). Moreover, there are many factors that influence a restaurant's food quality. Such as the presentation of the food, functional structure, the method of food preparation by the restaurant's employee, and the knowledge acquired in managing the quality control system (Krasavcil *et al* 2012; Opolski *et al.*,2011). Also, Susskind and Chan (2000) found that customers opined that food quality was the main reason for them to visit the restaurant. Some elements of food quality such as the taste of food, variation of menu, and the nutrition inside the meals have positive effect on customer satisfaction, loyalty and patronage behavior ( Kivela *et al.*, 2002)

Patronage arises when an individual displays conscious effort to choose a solution towards his or her need(s) through the process of analyzing situations which would be rewarding and relatively satisfying amidst some challenges faced in the course of fulfilling his/her own desires (Adiele & Grend, 2016). This explains why individuals can exhibit unconditional attachment and affection towards objects or persons ( Adiele & Etuk, 2017). Patronage in the food service industry entails the deliberate act of a customer to consistently purchase cooked food from a particular eatery or restaurant instead of going to other fast food service providers. Patronage could be defined as the customer's selection of an eatery from a set of alternatives. However, what determines a customer's choice of selecting or patronizing a fast food restaurant differs from one country to another and from one region or state to another as a result of cultural, environmental and socio-economic specifics. Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013) opined that the factors that may likely influence restaurant patronage include the physical surrounding, service quality and food quality. Furthermore, Setian, *et al* (2013) included food quality, service quality, atmospheric quality, perceived value as factors influencing consumer's patronage intentions.

Notably in a study conducted by Akbar and Alaudeen (2012) on the determinants or factors that influence customers in choosing normal full-service restaurant in Malaysia, it was found that much priority was placed on food quality, trust worthiness, service quality, price, environment and restaurant location. Also, Abdullah (2013) examined determining factors that influence customer's patronage intention In Malaysia and the result indicated that food quality and perceived value significantly contributed to the rate of repeat patronage of the restaurants. From the foregoing discussion and the results obtained from the review of empirical and extant literature, it appears that a relationship exists between food quality and patronage in the food service industry.

## Methodology.

Ontologically, this study took a realist view and a positivist epistemology. It therefore adopted a quantitative research approach and cross- sectional survey research design in a non- contrived setting, where the researchers were not in complete control of the elements of the research.

The study population comprised ten thousand estimated customers of the registered and operational Quick- Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt. Considering the fact that our population



of study was a flow population; Godden (2004) argued that population estimation is the best method to be adopted in arriving at a finite population of study. The fast food restaurants considered in the study were 31 functional fast food firms which were enlisted in the Yellow Pages of Rivers State Ministry of Commerce & Industry and registered with the Association of Fast Food and Confectionary of Nigeria (AFCON) Rivers State Branch. Furthermore, the sample size for the study is 370 customers of the restaurants which were determined using the Krejice and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for a finite population.

Primary data was drawn from three hundred and thirty-two (322) retrieved copies of structured questionnaire; which were cleaned, and used for the study. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics while the hypothesis was tested by employing the Spearman Rank Correlation Technique (SPRC) which was facilitated with the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The research instrument adopted the 5 point Likert scale method in the measurement of the three Constructs namely: Customer service delivery, Patronage and restaurant perceived image which ranged from "Strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

The face validity of the research instrument was ensured by colleagues and other experts in the field of measurement and evaluation. These experts assessed the relevance of each item, in relation to the specific objectives of the study and the hypotheses to be tested and how adequate the items are with regards to measuring the constructs they are designed to measure as well as the ease with which each item could be scored for use in data analysis.

Similarly, reliability was ensured by pretesting the questionnaire on at least 50 students and lecturers who were customers of these selected fast food firms who may have patronized them in the past one year, who were not part of the main study. The researchers also used the Cronbach's Alpha analysis to ascertain the reliability and internal consistency of the measurement instrument. Ahiauzu (2006) has also reiterated that the Cronbach Alpha is a good reliability coefficient that indicates how well items in a questionnaire set are positively correlated to one another. This was facilitated with the use of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 22. Most of the instruments used to measure the constructs in this study were adapted from Kukoyi and Iwuagwu (2015), Donkoh, *et al* (2012), Kim *et al* (2009) and Sulek and Hensley (2004). Table 1 shows the instrument reliability distribution rate.

**Table 1. Cronbach alpha coefficient for the study**

Theoretical Constructs	Dimensions/Measures	Indicators	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Customer service delivery	Employee service time	5	0.948
	Service Reliability	5	0.927
	Food quality	5	0.933
Customer service patronage	Repeat purchase behaviour	3	0.930
	Customer retention	3	0.943
Perceived image		3	0.915

Source: Survey Data, 2007.



In order to ensure content validity, items measuring Customer Service Delivery including employee service time, service reliability and food quality were adapted from Kim *et al* (2009), Customer patronage was measured by items including repeat purchase behavior and customer retention which were adapted from Sulek and Hensley (2004), while the moderating variable Restaurant Perceived Image was measured with instruments adapted from Leoven (2015) and especially Ahmad (2015). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to ascertain or test the instrument reliability, which is also an indicator of the internal consistency of a measure (Witney, 1996; Ahiauzu, 2006).

### Test of Hypotheses, Data Presentation and Results

This section is concerned with the analysis and presentation of the results for the empirical assessment of the effect of food quality on patronage of Quick –Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt.

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** Food quality does not have any significant influence on repeat purchase behaviour in quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 2. Test for Correlation between Food Quality and Repeat Purchase Behaviour

			Quality	Repeat
Spearman's rho	Quality	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.612**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
	Repeat	Correlation Coefficient	.612**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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

The result as depicted in table 2 revealed that there is a significant relationship between food quality and customer repeat purchase behaviour. The data indicates that food quality significantly impacts on customer repeat purchase behaviour (where rho = .612 and P < 0.05). The evidence advocates that food quality is a significant predictor of customer repeat purchase behaviour. Hence on the basis of the result, hypothesis (HO<sub>1</sub>) is rejected.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** Food quality do not have any significant influence on customer retention in quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 3. Test for Correlation between Food Quality and Customer Retention

			Quality	Retention
Spearman's rho	Quality	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.684**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
	Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.684**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	332	332

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



The result as depicted in table 3. revealed that there is a significant relationship between food quality and customer retention. The data indicates that food quality significantly impacts on customer retention (where  $\rho = .684$  and  $P < 0.05$ ). The evidence suggests that food quality is a significant determinant of customer retention. Hence on the basis of the result, hypothesis ( $H_{O_2}$ ) is rejected.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section is concerned with the discussion of major findings obtained from the test of hypothesized statements in this study. The discussion is presented as follows:

#### **Food quality and Repeat purchase behaviour:**

The test of hypothesis five ( $H_{O_1}$ ) as depicted in table 2, revealed a significant relationship between food quality and repeat purchase behaviour. The relationship was observed to be significant at a 0.05 level of significance. The evidence indicated that quality as earlier observed by Ehigie (2006) is critical to sustaining and retaining the customers of the organization. The evidence generated herein illustrate that food quality is imperative as regards the actualization of customer repeat purchase and customer retention. This implied that one of the main centralities of fast food outlets which would enable them retain their customer base would draw substantially from their capacity for excellence and quality in their service and foods. The finding corroborates the views of Sulek and Hensley (2004) who found that food quality is the best important factor influencing customer satisfaction, as well as being the only attribute for lasting dining behavioural intention. Hence, this study affirms that food quality is significant in actualizing customer patronage which is measured by repeat purchase behaviour. From the foregoing discussion, the authors affirm that food quality is a vital antecedent to repeat purchase behaviour in quick service restaurants in Port-Harcourt

#### **Food quality and Customer Retention**

The test of hypothesis two ( $H_{O_2}$ ) as depicted in table 3. revealed a significant relationship between food quality and customer retention. The relationship was observed to be significant at a 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, the result showed that 68.4% of the change in patronage which is measured by customer retention is explained by restaurant's food quality. The finding supports the opinion of Domingo (2002) that food quality was the only factor that has a significant effect on return patronage and customer retention. Moreover, previous studies had also shown that food quality influences customer satisfaction, loyalty and patronage (Jaská & John, 1999; John & Tyas, 1999). However, what determines a customer's choice of selecting or patronizing a fast food restaurant differs from one country to another and from one region or state to another as a result of cultural, environmental and socio-economic specifics. Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013) opined that the factors that may likely influence restaurant patronage include the physical surrounding, service quality and food quality. Furthermore, Setian, *et al* (2013) included food quality, service quality, atmospheric quality, perceived value as factors influencing consumer's patronage intentions.

Notably in a study, conducted by Akbar and Alaudeen (2012) on the determinants or factors that influence customers in choosing normal full-service restaurant in Malaysia, it was found that much priority were placed on food quality, trust worthiness, service quality, price, environment and restaurant location. Also, Abdullah (2013) examined determining factors that influence customer's patronage intention In Malaysia and the result indicated that food quality and perceived value significantly contributed to the rate of repeat patronage of the restaurants. From the foregoing



discussion and the results obtained from the review of empirical and extant literature, it appears that, a relationship exists between food quality and customer retention in the food service industry, and the authors also shares similar opinion. Based on the foregoing discussions, it seems that a relationship exists between food quality and customer retention in quick service restaurants and on the basis of this assertion, the authors conclude that food quality is a major determinant of customer retention in quick service restaurants in Port- Harcourt

## Conclusion

Quick-service restaurants are required to produce contented consumers that ultimately lead to loyalty behaviors toward the restaurant, if they desire to be sustainable. Thus, in today's fast and dynamic competitive food market, the baseline of a firm's promotion and marketing strategies, tactics and procedure is to maximize profits and add to the growth of the company while enhancing sustainability. In the restaurant/food service industry, this goal can be achieved when conscious efforts are made by the firms to increase customer satisfaction and patronage which is anchored on good food and service quality. Quick-service restaurants can improve consumers' dining satisfaction and impact their future behavioral intentions if they offer excellent value-for-money food quality, excellent service quality, and also provide an ambience that meets and ideally exceeds consumers' expectations.

The aim of this study was to assess empirically the relationship between food quality and patronage of quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study presumed that food quality would have a positive influence on customer patronage behavioural intentions. However, from the review of empirical and extant literature on previous studies in the food service industry, it was found that food quality is a major determinant of quick service restaurants patronage and that it also has a great influence on customer satisfaction and overall dining experience. From the findings therefore, the researchers' concluded that food quality significantly affects fast food restaurant patronage. Hence, they recommend that food service firms in Port Harcourt should constantly improve on their food quality in order to increase their level of patronage, thus bolstering chances of sustainability. The managers of quick food restaurants thus need to pay attention to the main food quality attributes that prompt customer satisfaction and augment return visits to a restaurant.

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