

1 Consumer Perceptions about Fast Food Restaurants in Asaba

2 Dr. C.G.E. Salami¹ and R.T. Ajobo²

3 ¹ Delta State University

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5 **Abstract**

6 The fast food culture is fast expanding in Nigeria. Much of that is attributable to the
7 increasing affluence, rapid urbanization, and changing life styles among Nigerians. Although
8 many of the fast food chains offer similar or undifferentiated products the way and manner
9 their services are provided are critical to gaining competitive edge. In Asaba the Delta State
10 capital, experience has shown that as one new fast food outlet opens shop some of the old ones
11 close, thereby suggesting a ?revolving door syndrome? in the fast food industry. This paper
12 therefore, sought to assess the perceptions of customers about service quality in selected fast
13 food restaurants in Asaba. A total of 180 customers were randomly selected and administered
14 a 22 â?? item structured questionnaire out of which 120 were found useable. An analysis of
15 variance (ANOVA) indicated that the range of products, availability and consistency of
16 products as well as packaging significantly affect customer perception about service quality at
17 .001. Gender and price do not affect customer perceptions about quality of service. The
18 findings further showed that customers patronize fast food for the change and not because of
19 nutritional value. Therefore fast food is not yet perceived as a clear alternative to homemade
20 cooking. Major recommendation is for fast food chains to improve on the nutritional value of
21 their products.

24 **Index terms**— Service, Quality, Fast food, Undifferentiated products, Consumers, Homemade meals, local
25 menu.

26 **1 INTRODUCTION**

27 Nigerians were first introduced to fast foods within the context of what obtains in the West by the United African
28 Company (UAC) when they opened MR. BIGGS restaurant in 1987. However, long before then traditional fast
29 foods had been in vogue and continue to be patronized. These include roasted plantain (bolie), roasted/fried yam
30 (dundun), akara, suya meat (beef kebab), and fura de nono (local yogurt). Since the introduction of Mr. Biggs
31 into the fast food industry, consumer acceptance of fast food has continued to increase. These include Tantalizers,
32 Sweet Sensation, Tasty Fried Chicken, Chicken Republic, Mama Cass, Munchies etc. Some of the fast food chains
33 like Mr. Biggs, Tantalizers and Tasty Fried Author : Department of Business Administration and Marketing
34 Faculty of Management Sciences Delta State University Asaba, Nigeria. E-mail : charles.salami@yahoo.com
35 Author : Department of Business Administration and Marketing Faculty of Management Sciences Delta State
36 University Asaba, Nigeria. E-mail : ajobort@yahoo.com Chicken are now listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange
37 (NSE). The latest big entrants are McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC).

38 With the exception of McDonalds and KFC none of the other fast food chains are known to operate under
39 franchise agreements, even though many of them have outlets in the major cities of Nigeria such as Abuja, Port
40 Harcourt, Ibadan, Calabar, Warri and Asaba. The city of Lagos remains the headquarters of fast foods in Nigeria,
41 although with the rapid urbanization and expansion of the other cities it means that most expansion in the fast
42 food industry will take place outside Lagos.

6 IV. OVERVIEW OF FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

43 Since the 1960s Nigeria has had one of the fastest population growth rates in the world. In 2010 almost half
44 of all Nigerians (70 million) live in cities (Business Wire, 2011). As more people migrate to the already crowded
45 cities the demand for fast food will be expected to increase. To meet the demand many local restaurants known
46 as Bukateria have mushroomed in many of the cities along side the Western-oriented fast food restaurants to
47 serve this added population.

48 2 II.

49 3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

50 The consumer's tastes and needs are dynamic, implying that every brand should constantly seek ways to offer
51 freshness in order to remain relevant in the market place. The restaurant industry is no longer divided into
52 clear-cut segments since the services offered do sometimes overlap. Many of the fast food restaurants offer
53 similar products or services. Therefore, the way and manner their services are provided are critical to gaining
54 competitive edge. In Asaba, the capital of Delta State, experience has shown that just as a new The city of Asaba
55 was selected because it is the state capital. Also, because of its close proximity to Onitsha (the commercial capital
56 of neighbouring Anambra State), it experiences a high volume of both human and vehicular traffic. Furthermore,
57 its strategic location as the gateway to the Western parts of Nigeria, it is home to majority of the ethnic groups
58 in Nigeria. Being an oil-producing state it has one of the fastest growing economies in the federation. Fast food
59 outlet opens shop some of the older ones are closing making it appear as if the fast food industry is a "revolving
60 door". For example, just as Zinos restaurant was going out of business Favourites was opening shop.

61 The restaurant diner seem to have added some scrutiny to his/her menu perusal and upped what he/she
62 outside dinning experience. In addition to the "feel good" experiences they are also critical of food taste.

63 The question then is -what is the potential fast food restaurant guest looking for? What must fast food
64 restaurant owner do to be able to project the right image as well as meet the needs of the customers? Because
65 many of the fast food restaurants provide undifferentiated products, service quality becomes a discriminator
66 between superior/inferior product or service. Any service provider that seeks to enjoy competitive edge must
67 respond to customer needs so as to promote satisfaction and gain customer loyalty. In otherwords, you must
68 either adapt or die. Consequently, this paper sought to assess the perceptions of customers about service quality
69 in selected fast food restaurants in Asaba. There are several studies that address behavioural service quality,
70 customer satisfaction, and behavioural interntions in fast food restaurant (FFRs) ??Brady et al. 2001, Gulbert.
71 et al. 20004; ??ara et al. (1995). However, to the best of our knowledge none has focused on the city of Asaba.

72 4 III.

73 5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

74 The objective of this study is to assess the customer perceptions about the quality of service in selected fast
75 food restaurants in Asaba. The specific objectives included: 1. Determine the number of fast food restaurants
76 in Asaba 2. Determine the range of products or services provided by the restaurants. 3. Determine how often
77 customers purchase fast foods. 4. Determine the dimensions/attributes of service quality

78 6 IV. OVERVIEW OF FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

79 A fast food restaurant (FFR) also known as a Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) within the industry itself, is a
80 specific type of restaurant characterized both by the fast cuisine and by minimal table service. Food served in
81 fast food restaurants are cooked in bulk in advance and kept hot, is finished and packaged to order and is usually
82 available ready to take away, eventhough seating may be provided. The term "fast food" was recognized in a
83 dictionary by merriam-Webster in 1952.

84 Some trace the modern history of fast foods in America to ??uly 7, 1912 with the opening of a fast food
85 restaurant called the Automat in New York. The Automat was a cafeteria with its prepared foods behind small
86 glass windows and coin-operated slots. The company also popularized the notion of "take-out" food, with their
87 slogan "less work for mother". The American company White castle is generally credited with opening the second
88 fast-food outlet in Wichita, Kansas in 1921. Most historians and secondary school textbooks state that A & W
89 was the first fast food restaurant which opened in 1919 ??Grass, 1977). By 1961 Ray Krock bought out the
90 McDonald brothers and created what is now the modern McDonald's corporation. One of his major business
91 strategy was to promote cleanliness of his restaurants to the growing groups of Americans that had become aware
92 of food safety issues.

93 Fast food has generally been designed to be eaten "on -the -go" and often does not require traditional cutlery
94 and is eaten as a finger food. Fast food outlets have become popular with consumers for several reasons. One
95 is that through economics of scale in purchasing and and producing food, these companies can deliver food to
96 consumers at a very low cost. According to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs ([Http:// exchanges.](http://exchanges.State.gov)
97 [State.gov](http://exchanges.State.gov)) although some people dislike fast food for its predictability, it can be reassuring to a hungry person
98 in a hurry or far from home.

99 In his best-selling 2001 book *Fast Food Nation*, schlosser (2001) leveled a broad, socio-economic critic against
100 the fast food industry, documenting how fast food rose from small, family-run businesses (like McDonald brothers'
101 hamburger joint) into large, multinational corporate juggernauts whose economies of scale radically transformed
102 agriculture, meat processing, and labour markets in the late 20th century. He argues further that while the
103 innovations of fast food industry gave Americans more and cheaper dining options, it has come at the price of
104 destroying the environment, economy, and small-town communities of rural America while shielding consumers
105 from the real costs of their convenient meals, both in terms of health and the broader impact of large-scale food
106 production and processing on workers, animals and land.

107 V.

108 **7 RISE OF FAST FOODS**

109 Because Nigeria is one of the fastest growing economy in the world, coupled with what may be described as
110 emerging acculturation, more fast food restaurants are being established even on smaller scale. The expansion in
111 the fast food industry may be attributed to the following:

112 Increasing urban migration which affect the younger population who are also more receptive to the fast food
113 concept; increasing Western acculturation among the populace; the increasing affluence among the people; 1.
114 the changing life styles as indicated by the increasing belief that eating out is part of leisure; 2. the perception
115 among the working class singles (male and female) that fast food is cheaper and perhaps more efficient on their
116 time; little room for cooking at home; 5. the expansion of fast food menus to incorporate indigenous dishes
117 provide prospective customers a desired alternative to the Western meals.

118 Because the fast food industry is highly labourintensive, they constitute a major employer of labour.

119 Although there is the strong potential for success in the fast food industry there are many challenges facing
120 the industry such as: 1. inadequate number of food processing to add value to items like chicken, meat and fresh
121 fish products, frozen ofoods and canned vegetables which affect operating costs. 2. Cost of fund remains high
122 and prohibitive due to high interest rates which also contribute to high operating costs. 3. Poor infrastructure
123 including power, poor road network as well as the sometimes overlapping roles of the different tiers of government.

124 VI.

125 **8 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

126 The following hypotheses were formulated to test the perceptions of customers about service quality. 1. H 1 :
127 The range of products, cleanliness, and decor affect perceptions of service quality. 2. H 2 : Courtesy, respect,
128 and friendliness of employees affect service quality 3. H 3 : Consistency and promptness of service affect server
129 quality. 4. H 4 : Individualized attention, ease of contact, and understanding the needs of customers affect
130 service quality. VII.

131 **9 LITERATURE REVIEW**

132 No business exist without customers. In the philosophical words of Peppers and Rogers "The ony value your
133 company will ever create is the value that comes from customers -the ones you have now and the ones you will have
134 in future". This is absolutely true. Customer value is an asset to the organization. Munusamy, Chelliah and Mun
135 (2010) argued that in order to maintain the customer, the organization needs to ensure that the right products
136 and services, supported by the right promotion and making it available at the right time for the customers. They
137 argue that customer satisfaction measurement is a postconsumption assessment by the user, about the products
138 or services gained. Consumers tend to organize information at various levels of abstraction which range from
139 simple product attributes to complex personal values. Micuda and Dinculescu (2010) noted that attributes that
140 signal quality have been dichotomized into "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" cues. Intrinsic cues are attributes that
141 are part of the physical composition of the product such as flavour, colour, size, fitness for use, styles and so on.
142 They cannot be changed without changing the nature of the product and are consumed along with the product.
143 On the other hand, extrinsic cues are attributes that relate to the product, but are not product-specific and can
144 serve as general indicators of quality across all types of products.

145 Quality in service has been defined as a construct composed of a technical dimension and a functional or
146 rational dimension: the former centres upon what is delivered by the company to the customer -result, whereas
147 the latter refers to the way the service is performed (Gronroos, 1984). Parasuraman et al. (1988) studied
148 four consumer service industries: long distance telephone, banking, credit cards and an appliance repair and
149 maintenance. They found consistent attributes of perceived quality across the four industries. They included
150 reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Micuda and Dinculescu (2010) argued that the five
151 attributes suffer from at least two major shortcomings. Firstly, they are broad and not industry-specific since
152 they don't provide cues that consumers can use to infer service quality. Secondly, the particular attributes or
153 cues that comprise each dimension vary across service contexts. The five-dimensional structure could serve as
154 a meaningful framework for tracking a firm's service quality performance over time and comparing it against
155 competitors.

156 Western style fast food franchises are increasingly crossing national boundaries and looking for growth among
157 customers in Nigeria. Nigeria is becoming a major player in the global market because of its size and growth
158 potential.

159 Service quality is reflected in a consumer's evaluative perception of an encountered service ??Cronin & Taylor
160 1994. ??eithaml and Bitner (2000) suggested that consumers judge the quality of a service based on their
161 perceptions of the technical outcome provided, the process by which the outcome is delivered, and the quality of
162 the physical surroundings where the service is delivered. Today, almost all the FFRS focus on several ways to
163 increase their service quality in order to increase the level of satisfaction among their customers and thus increase
164 their purchase intentions as well as loyalty (Qin & Prybutok, 2008; Gilbert, Veloutson, Goode, & Mountho,
165 2004; Kara, Kaynak, & Kucukemiroglu, 1995). When FFRS are able to achieve or exceed the expectations of
166 customers, the customer will be satisfied with the service. Customer satisfaction may be viewed as the individual's
167 perception of the performance of a product or service in relation to his or her expectations. Grilbert et al (2004)
168 argue that service quality measurement need to be done frequently to obtain an accurate current level of service
169 quality .

170 10 Global Journal of Management and Business Research Vol- 171 ume XII Issue I Version I

172 Consumer Perceptions about Fast Food Restaurants in Asaba provided by a fast food restaurant in order to
173 increase customer satisfaction as well as to encourage customer repurchase intentions towards the restaurant.

174 According to Leon & Leslie (2006) the degree of satisfaction provided by the goods or services of a firm can
175 be measured by the number of repeat customers. Tat et al. (2011) posit that intense competition and high
176 quality expectation from customers have forced many fast food companies do transform from a productcentric
177 approach to a customer centric approach. Therefore, understanding each customer's distinct needs and recent
178 service quality level are essential for an FFRS to maintain and enhance their competitive edge. A study by Tat
179 et al. (2011) indicated a strong relationship between customers' perceived overall service quality and customer
180 satisfaction. Diners whose experiences match expectations will be satisfied and where their expectations are
181 exceeded they will be very satisfied.

182 11 VIII. METHODOLOGY

183 The research instrument adopted for this study was a 22 item structured questionnaire. The items were developed
184 based on the attributes of quality proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). They include reliability, assurance,
185 responsiveness, empathy and tangibility. The study sought to assess customer perceptions about service quality
186 in selected fast food restaurants (FFRs) in the city of Asaba. They include Mr. Biggs, Sizzlers, Macdons, and
187 Mocwiss out of the seven major FFRs in Asaba. The population comprised all those who have had experience
188 patronizing FFRs in Asaba.

189 The sampling techniques adopted was the random sampling which ensured that each member had an equal
190 chance of being selected. A total of 160 questionnaires were administered to customers of the selected fast food
191 restaurants, out of which only 120 (67%) were found usable. The total sample comprised 70 (58%) female and
192 50 (42%) male (see Table 1) More than 85% of the respondents were between 24 and 40 years old (table 2);
193 while majority of the respondents are married (table ??). Means and standard deviations were used to identify
194 the levels of customers' perceived quality towards FFRs. The five independent variables of empathy, assurance,
195 reliability, responsiveness, and tangibility were tested on their impact on service quality using ANOVA. However,
196 because of the overlap of the two dimensions of reliability and reliability they were merged. ** Significant at P
197 <.05

198 12 RESULTS

199 13 As shown in

200 Table 5 present the results of customer perceptions about service quality based on the four dimensions of quality.
201 The table shows that the overall services provided by FFRs are favourably perceived by customers. The four
202 dimensions of quality significantly affect customer perceptions about quality. The dimension of tangibility which
203 assessed the range of products, cleanliness, physical condition, and the overall décor of a FFR show a significant
204 value of .003. Therefore, H 1 which says the range of service, cleanliness, and décor affect customer perceptions
205 about quality was accepted.

206 This means that prospective FFR owners should seek to ensure they provide a range of products in a clean
207 environment. Similarly, the dimension of assurance which include courtesy, and friendliness of employees, respect,
208 and security of customers had a significant value of .002. Therefore, H 2 which sought to test the effect of courtesy
209 and security was accepted. The implication is that a courteous and friendly employees affect customer perceptions
210 about quality. The dimensions of reliability 79 Global Journal of Management and Business Research Volume
211 XII Issue I Version I Consumer Perceptions about Fast Food Restaurants in Asaba and responsiveness which
212 include the attributes of consistency and promptness of service significantly customer perceptions at a value of
213 .016. Consequently, the result supports hypothesis (H 3) and was therefore accepted.

214 Finally, H 4 which tested the dimension of empathy with attributes such as caring, providing individualized
215 attention to customers, ease of contact, as well as understanding customers' needs showed the existence of
216 significant effect on customer perceptions on service quality at .000. This result supports the hypothesis that
217 providing are, individualized attention, approachability, and understanding customer needs affect customer
218 perception about quality, and was therefore accepted.

219 X.

220 14 DISCUSSION

221 The following is the discussion on the findings about the perceptions of customers on the quality of fast food
222 restaurant in the city of Asaba. The study was based on the five dimensions of quality as proposed by parasuraman
223 et al ??1988). These include tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. However, because
224 of the seeming overlap of the attributes of responsiveness and reliability, the two dimensions were merged. The
225 study revealed that all the dimensions were critical to customers' perceptions about the source quality of FFRs.

226 Research has indicated that service quality has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of
227 any business (parasuraman et al, 1988) and the fast food industry is no exception. Service quality has been widely
228 used to evaluate the performance of banking services (Cowling and Newman, 1995). For example the banks (a
229 service industry) understand that customers will be loyal if they can receive greater value than from competitors
230 (Dawes and Siwailes, 1999). Chaoprasert and Elsey (??004) have argued that customers can perceive differences
231 in the quality of service they get.

232 The study revealed that the dimension of tangibility which include the range of products served and the
233 cleanliness of the environment affect customer perceptions about the service quality of a FFR. The implication
234 here is that FFRs should incorporate local menu in order to provide customers a broad spectrum to choose
235 from. Mr. Biggs is beginning to respond in that direction. Respondents were asked to rank the attributes of
236 quality in order of importance. The result indicated that the quality of food, cleanliness, consistency, manner
237 and hospitality of staff as the most important to customers. (see Table 6). This result agrees with a similar
238 study by Chee (2010) of fast food restaurant buying behavior in India. This kind of information can be an
239 important guide for the formulation of correct customer-friendly marketing strategies of a fast food chain. Some
240 respondents were interviewed on whether they perceive fast food as a clear alternative to homemade meals. Out
241 of the 15 respondents, 11 (73%) said that they perceive FFRs as mere outlets for fun and change but believe
242 that homemade food remains their favourite because of the nutritional value and the hygienic condition which
243 they are made. This findings agree with the result of a similar study by Goyal and Singh (2007) who found that
244 although young Indian consumers patronize FFRs their preference is homemade foods.

245 Fast foods as the name implies, are for convenience as nobody has to cook or clean up as well as the speed
246 of service. Viewed from this context fast food fulfill the needs of people in a hurry but need a meal. Although
247 the concensus response of people who patronize fast food is that they are seeking a change from the rigours of
248 homemade meals, FFR owners should intensify efforts towards increasing the nutritional value for customers.

249 The study showed that they empathy dimension contributed the highest perception level in service quality. This
250 is consistent with the study by ??how and Luk (2005) where they claimed that customers regarded "empathy" as
251 the highest priority in assessing service quality of a FFR. This is because it provides caring, individualized
252 attention, approachability, as well as understanding the needs of customers. The study also revealed that
253 assurance dimension has a positive influence on customer perception about service quality. However, the finding
254 did not corroborate with some studies such as Festus et al. (??006); Landrum et al. (??006) who stated that
255 other dimensions were more dominant in predicting customer satisfaction. These differing results may be due
256 to the different models used, industries or sampling method adopted. As Tsai and Huang (2002) have noted,
257 employee expertise is an important component of overall service quality. One implication therefore, is for FFRs to
258 improve on their assurance dimension by becoming more welcoming courteous, knowledgeable, and trustworthy
259 during transactions.

260 The dimensions of responsiveness and reliability which include the attributes of consistency, wiliness to help
261 customers, the degree to which they inspire confidence, and promptness of service impact positively on quality.
262 The results of this study showed that these attributes significantly affect service quality. This result tend to agree
263 with Gronroos (1984) that customers tend to evaluate service providers (including FFRs) mainly on the basis
264 of personal contact and interaction. It is critical for FFRs to provide reliable and responsive services. This is
265 because reliability and trust are necessary for a successful business. Tat et al. ??2011) in their study confirmed
266 that perceived service quality can have a powerful impact on satisfaction. Poor service quality increase customer
267 dissatisfaction and the likelihood that customers dine at a competitor and/or become an active champion in
268 persuading others to go elsewhere ??Gilbert, et al. 2004) Finally, Qin (2008) incorporated the dimension of
269 recoverability in proposing a FFR success model. He defined recoverability as the ability to deal with service
270 failures. Previous findings indicated that failure itself doesn't necessarily lead to customer dissatisfaction, but
271 failure to effectively handle recoveries can lead to lost customers and negative word-of-mouth ??Heskett, et al;
272 ??994; ??cColl, et al; ??005). In addition, service quality and satisfaction could affect consumers' likelihood to
273 recommend a FFR to others.

274 **15 XI. CONCLUSION**

275 The average fast food consumer patronizes a restaurant once a week for lunch or dinner. Fast food consumers
276 eat out for the change and not because of their nutritional superiority over homemade meals. Customers attach
277 great importance to the quality of food, cleanliness, consistency, and the general attitude of the staff. Therefore,
278 by evaluating a fast food restaurant on these attributes will enable a manager understand the market trends so as
279 to develop effective marketing and operational strategies. Price of products are low on customers' scale of values.
280 Improving the nutritional value of fast food can attract more customers to fast food and help in developing a
trust that fast food can be a clear alternative to homemade meals. ^{1 2 3}

1

| S Sex | F Frequency | P Percentage |
|----------|-------------|--------------|
| M Male | 50 | 48 |
| F Female | 70 | 52 |
| T Total | 120 | 100.00 |

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

| Age | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative F Frequency |
|--------------|-----------|---------|------------------------|
| 16-23 | 18 | 15.0 | 15.0 |
| 24-29 | 24 | 20.0 | 35.0 |
| 30-35 | 23 | 19.2 | 54.2 |
| 36-41 | 26 | 21.6 | 54.2 |
| 42 and above | 29 | 24.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 3 : Marital Status

| Marital Status | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Single | 50 | 41.7 |
| Married | 58 | 48.3 |
| Divorced | 12 | 10.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100.00 |

Table 4

Figure 2: Table 2 :

5

: ANOVA

Figure 3: Table 5

281

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| Attributes | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Quality of food | 44 | 36.7 |
| Cleanliness | 37 | 30.8 |
| Consistency | 25 | 30.8 |
| Hospitality of staff | 14 | 11.7 |
| Total | 120 | 100.00 |

Figure 4: Table 6 :

282 Consumer Perceptions about Fast Food Restaurants in Asaba 3. the changing demographic composition of
283 the workplace as more women are employed at different levels of the economy; 4. pressure of work and other
284 social activities leave

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