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SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMERS PATRONAGE IN FAST FOOD OUTLETS IN AUCHI METROPOLIS, EDO STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effect of service quality and customers patronage in fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolic, Edo State Nigeria. Specifically, the study's aims to assess the influence of food quality on customer loyalty among fast food outlets in Auchi metropolis, to examine the influence of customer value on customer loyalty a*mong fast food outlets and also to examine the impact of empathy service on repeated purchase among fast food outlets in Auchi. To achieve this objective, the study adopted a descriptive survey research drawn from an infinite population, of which a sample of 361 fast foods in Auchi metropolis was randomly selected using Cochran's sample size technique. The data obtained through a structured questionnaire were analysed using both descriptive statistic and Pearson Product Moment correlation at 5% significance level. The findings reveal that there is positive significant relationship between quality food and customer loyalty. The findings further indicate positive correlation between customer value and customer patronage*

while there is also significant relationship between empathy service and customer repeated purchase in Auchi metropolis. The study therefore among others recommends that food outlets should prioritize and maintain high food quality standard to maintain customers loyalty and also fast food outlets should train their staffs on how to show empathy towards customers concerns and needs that will create a positive customer experience, leading to increased repeated purchases.

Keyword: fast food, customers' empathy, repeated purchase, customers loyalty, competitive value

Introduction

Service quality refers to the extent to which the services provided meet or exceed customer expectations, encompassing various dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Adegbuyi, *et al*, 2021). Customers' perceptions of service quality significantly influence their patronage decisions, loyalty, and ultimately, the success of fast food retail outlets. Positive experiences with service quality can lead to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and increased customer loyalty, all of which contribute to the sustainability and profitability of the business. Conversely, poor service quality can result in customer dissatisfaction, negative reviews, and a decline in customer patronage (Ali, *et al*, 2020).

Today, Auchi Metropolis, located in Edo State like any other cities in Nigeria, had experienced significant urbanization and population growth in recent years. This rapid urbanization has brought about changes in lifestyle patterns and dietary preferences, leading to an increased reliance on fast food outlets as a primary source of meals. The metropolis now boasts a vibrant fast food industry, with a variety of local and international brands competing for the attention and patronage of consumers (Yang, *et al*, 2019).

However, in this highly competitive market, the success and survival of fast food retail outlets hinge on their ability to deliver exceptional service quality that aligns with customer expectations. Service quality refers to the extent to which the services provided meet or

exceed customer expectations, encompassing various dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Adegbuyi, *et al*, 2021). Customers' perceptions of service quality significantly influence their patronage decisions, loyalty, and ultimately, the success of fast food retail outlets. Positive experiences with service quality can lead to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and increased customer loyalty, all of which contribute to the sustainability and profitability of the business. Conversely, poor service quality can result in customer dissatisfaction, negative reviews, and a decline in customer patronage (Ali, *et al*, 2020).

Understanding the dynamics of service quality and customer patronage in the fast food industry within Auchi Metropolis is crucial for both researchers and industry practitioners. Service delivery determines the level of customer loyalty and satisfaction (Babatude & Omowunmi, 2021). Aladejebi, *et al*, (2021) emphasized that service quality is important in driving customer patronage and satisfaction in the Nigerian Fast-food industry. While studies have explored this topic in various contexts, there is a need for specific research that focuses on the local dynamics and unique characteristics of fast food retail outlet of Auchi Metropolis.

The fast food industry has witnessed tremendous growth and transformation globally, driven by changing consumer lifestyles, urbanization, and an increased demand for convenience and quick-service dining options. Fast food retail outlets have become a ubiquitous presence in many cities and towns, catering to the needs of individuals and families seeking affordable and time-efficient meal solutions. Fast-food remains a powerful symbol of post-modern society and globalisation, and countries have begun to driving attention to its apparent attractions (Ugo & Idongesit, 202).

In a highly competitive market, fast food retailers in Auchi Metropolis face numerous challenges in attracting and retaining customers. Service quality has emerged as a critical factor that influences customer patronage in the fast food industry. Providing excellent service is no longer seen as an option but rather a necessity to stand out from the competition and build customer loyalty.

Although service quality is widely recognized as a critical factor in customer patronage, there is a lack of consensus on the dimensions that are most relevant in the fast food industry. Previous research has primarily relied on generic service quality models such as SERVQUAL, which may not capture the specific dimensions that matter most to fast food customers. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge the gap by examining the relationship between service quality and customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of service quality on customer patronage among fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolis. Specifically to:

i. Assess the influence of food quality on customer loyalty among fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

i. Examine the influence of customer value on customers loyalty among fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

ii. Examine the effect of responsiveness on customer satisfaction among fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in line with research objectives and questions to further guide the study.

$H0_1$: Food quality has no significant impact on customer loyalty among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

$H0_2$: Customer value has no significant impact on customer patronage among fast food outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

$H0_3$: Responsiveness has significant effect on customer satisfaction among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality

Service quality is a crucial aspect of any business that provides services. It refers to the level of excellence or satisfaction experienced by customers when they interact with a company's services (Majeed, *et al*, 2021). It encompasses various dimensions that collectively shape the customers' perception of the service they receive. Delivering high service quality is vital for customer retention, loyalty, and overall business success.

According to Rajput and Gahfoor (2020), service quality is a modern-day concept which assesses the excellence of restaurant brands. He further indicates that service quality imprint customer's first impression and also affects how customer perceives quality. Therefore, service providers maintain sustainable service quality to have competitive edge. According to Rajput and Gahfoor (2020), service quality comprises of friendliness, care, quick service delivery, diversity, and price. Therefore, the level of customer's satisfaction depends on the manner of which the needs of customers are met through good customer relationship; communication between the staff and customers, better brand image, amongst others (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020).

There is a growing body of research that suggests that service quality has a significant impact on customer patronage in the fast-food industry. For example, a study by Parasuraman, *et al* (1988) found that service quality was the most important factor

influencing customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry. Another study by Teas (1993) found that customer satisfaction was positively correlated with customer loyalty in the fast-food industry. Ramya *et al* (2019) describes the concept as a service that enables firm to retain its customers. Parasuraman *et al*. (1979) in Ramya*et al* (2019) opined that service quality is the provision of excellent or superior service in relation to customer expectations. This seen customer retention as an ultimate measure of quality service render by service providers.

Arasli and Mehtap-Samdi (2021) opined that Fast food restaurants are known for their quick service, and customers expect their orders to be processed and served promptly. Efficient service ensures that customers do not face unnecessary delays and can enjoy their meals without extended waiting times. Getting the order right is crucial in fast food service. Accuracy in taking and delivering orders minimizes the chances of customer dissatisfaction and the need for service recovery (Arasli & Mehtap-Samdi, 2021). According to Chahal and Bala (2021), friendly and polite staff members create a positive atmosphere in the restaurant and make customers feel welcome.

We can therefore established on basis of the above that service quality encompasses all the interactions and touch points between the customer and the restaurant staff, from the moment the customer enters the premises to the time they receive and consume their meal. Service quality is a critical aspect of the overall fast food experience and plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions, loyalty, and repeat business.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is an ongoing positive relationship between a customer and a business that drives repeat purchases and prompts existing customers to choose a company over a competitor offering similar benefits (. It is the result of customer satisfaction, positive

customer experiences, and the overall value of the goods or services a customer receives from a business. Loyal customers are those who make repeat purchases, aren't interested in competitors, engage with a company on various channels, provide feedback on how a company can improve its offerings, and advocate for the brand and recommend its products or services to others. Customer loyalty is important for many reasons, including that it strengthens marketing initiatives and campaigns, boosts profits, and retaining an existing customer is cheaper than acquiring a new one. Customer loyalty is a two-way street between businesses and customers, and it needs to be nurtured and cultivated. Companies need to recognize a changing landscape and evolve their business practices to stay current (Rajput &Gahfoor, 2020). Customer loyalty describes an ongoing emotional relationship between you and your customer, manifesting itself by how willing a customer is to engage with and repeatedly purchase from you versus your competitors. Loyalty is the byproduct of a customer's positive experience with you and works to create trust.

Empirical Review

Prior empirical results for related studies are reviewed based on each independent variable to customer patronage.

Zhong and Moon (2020) investigated factors driving customer satisfaction, loyalty, and happiness in fast-food restaurants in China. Perceived price, service, food quality, and physical environment quality were assessed, with gender's moderating role also considered. Through structural equation modeling, the study revealed positive effects of perceived price, food quality, and service on customer satisfaction, with perceived price influencing quality perceptions. Customer satisfaction and happiness, in turn, contributed to loyalty, and happiness acted as a mediator between satisfaction and loyalty. Notably, gender played a moderating role in perceptions of food quality and service satisfaction.

Uddin (2019) investigated customer loyalty within Bangladesh's fast food restaurant industry. Data from 204 respondents were gathered through convenient

sampling. The hypothesized model was assessed using techniques such as principal component analysis and structural equation modeling. The results showed positive connections between food quality, price, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer satisfaction was found to correlate positively with customer loyalty. However, an interesting observation was the inverse relationship between restaurant location/environment and customer satisfaction.

Abdullah *et al* (2018) explored the impact of food quality, service quality, and price fairness on re-patronage intention within halal-certified restaurants. Using an online survey and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), data from 110 respondents were analyzed. Results demonstrated that food quality, service quality, and price fairness influenced customer satisfaction, which in turn affected re-patronage intention. Additionally, customer satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Al-Tit (2015) conducted a study in Jordan to explore the relationships among service quality, food quality, customer satisfaction, and customer retention in limited service restaurants. A survey involving a questionnaire was administered to 400 students patronizing 10 such restaurants near universities in Amman. Service quality was assessed using SERVQUAL attributes, and key dimensions like food quality, customer satisfaction, and customer retention were identified from literature. The collected data (283 valid questionnaires) were analyzed through SPSS 20.0. The findings indicated that both service quality and food quality positively influenced customer satisfaction. Additionally, service quality dimensions, along with customer satisfaction, had a positive impact on customer retention. Moreover, the study confirmed that customer satisfaction acted as a mediator between service quality and customer retention. A notable limitation of this research was its small sample size

Martinez-Ruiz *et al* (2023) investigated the impact of food values on satisfaction and loyalty across different types of restaurants. Utilizing descriptive statistics and structural equation analysis, the study found that offering food reflecting both differential added value and basic value increased food satisfaction and subsequently customer loyalty to the food and the restaurant. Basic value offerings enhanced customers' food satisfaction in both restaurant types, while differential added value offerings influenced food satisfaction in traditional restaurants but not in fast-food establishments. The study's discussion delved into the implications of these findings for strategic positioning within the restaurant industry.

Gallarza, *et al* (2019) examined customer value within tourism and hospitality, expanding dimensions and the value-satisfaction-loyalty chain. Using a sample of 340 hotel guests, the empirical study validated a comprehensive causal model employing PLS. This model included eight value dimensions: functional (efficiency and excellence), social (status and esteem), hedonic (aesthetic and entertainment), and altruistic (ethics and escapism). The study introduced a second-order value construct and differentiated between affective and cognitive satisfaction. All effects within this intra-inter approach were highly significant.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and a sample of 361 fast foods in Auchi metropolis was randomly selected using Cochran’s sample size technique. The data obtained through a structured questionnaire were anlaysed using both descriptive and Pearson Product Moment correlation at 5% significance level.

Model Specification

The model for the study is presented below:

$CP = f(SQ)$ ……..……3.1

From the function above, the estimation questions are written as:

$CL = \beta_O + \beta_1 FQ + \varepsilon$ ……..….3.3

$CS = \beta_O + \beta_2 CV + \varepsilon$ ……...….3.4

$CP = \beta_O + \beta_3 RPS + \varepsilon$ …….3.5

$RP = \beta_O + \beta_4 ES + \varepsilon$ ……...3.6

Where;

Dependent Variables

CP = Customer Patronage

CL = Customer Loyalty

CS = Customer satisfaction

RP = Repeated Purchase

Independent Variables

SQ = Service Quality

FQ = Food Quality

CV = Customer Value

RPS = Responsiveness

β_O = Constant

$\beta_1 - \beta_5$ = coefficients of the independent variables

ε = stoch

Hypotheses Testing

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the relationship between the variables of the study, and as well as the significance of the relationships. This was tested at 5% level of significance.

Hypotheses I

H_o: Food quality has no significant impact on customer loyalty among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Ha: Food quality has significant impact on customer loyalty among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

The variables for this hypothesis are food quality (FQ) and customer loyalty (CL), these were used in the correlation analysis and its test of significance.

Table 4.10: Table of Correlation Coefficient and Test of Hypotheses
Results for food quality and customer loyalty

			FQ	CL
Pearson correlation	FQ	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.323**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	361	361
	CL	Correlation Coefficient	0.323**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	36`	361

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey (2025), SPSS 21.0 Version.

The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between food quality (FQ) and customer loyalty (CL). The positivecoefficient of 0.323suggests a positive linear relationship. This means that as the value of food quality increases, the value of customer loyalty also tends to increase. At both 1% and 5% significance levels, thelow p-value (0.000) suggest that there is a significant relationship between food quality and customer loyalty among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Based on the results, the alternative hypothesis is accepted that there is a positive and significant correlation between food quality and customer loyalty among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Hypotheses II

H_o: Customer value (price) has no significant impact on customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Ha: Customer value (price) has significant impact on customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

The variables for this hypothesis are Customer value (CV) and Customer patronage (CP), these were used in the correlation analysis and its test of significance.

Table 4.11: Table of Correlation Coefficient and Test of Hypotheses
Results for customer value and customer patronage

			CV	CP
Pearson correlation	CV	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.055
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.298
		N	361	361
	CP	Correlation Coefficient	**0.055**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.298	.
		N	302	302

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey (2025), SPSS 21.0 Version.

The correlation coefficient between customer value (CV) and customer patronage (CP) is positive (0.055), indicating a weak positive relationship. Therefore, an increase in the price of the products of fastfood will lead to a small increase in customer patronage. However, the p-value associated with this correlation (0.298) is greater than the significance levels (0.01 and 0.05), suggesting that the correlation is not statistically significant.

The low magnitude of the correlation coefficient and the lack of statistical significance indicate that there is no strong evidence to conclude that there is a meaningful linear relationship between customer value and customer patronage. From the above, the null hypothesis accepted that there is a positive correlation between customer value and customer patronage, but such correlation is statistically insignificant.

Hypotheses III

H_o: Responsiveness does not significantly impact customer satisfaction among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

Ha: Responsiveness has significantly impact on customer satisfaction among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis.

The variables for this hypothesis are responsiveness (RSP) and customer satisfaction (CS), these were used in the correlation analysis and its test of significance.

Table 4.12: Table of Correlation Coefficient and Test of Hypotheses

Results for responsiveness and customer satisfaction

			RSP	CS
Pearson correlation	RSP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.152**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	**0.004**
		N	361	361
	CS	Correlation Coefficient	0.152**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	**0.000**	.
		N	361	361

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

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Source:** Field survey (2025), SPSS 21.

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The Table presents the results of a correlation analysis between responsiveness (RSP) and customer satisfaction (CS). The correlation coefficient between responsiveness (RSP) and customer satisfaction (CS) is positive (0.152), indicating a positive linear

relationship. This suggests that as responsiveness increases, customer satisfaction tends to increase as well, and vice versa.

The p-value associated with this correlation (0.004) is less than the common significance levels (0.01 and 0.05), indicating that the correlation is statistically significant at both the 0.01 and 0.05 significance levels.

Based on the results, there is a statistically significant positive correlation between responsiveness and customer satisfaction. This suggests that there is evidence to support the hypothesis that responsiveness has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. As responsiveness increases, customer satisfaction is likely to increase as well.

Discussion of findings

The data were analysed using statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, and Pearson correlation to test the hypotheses. The bio-data of the respondents and research questions on each variable were analysed using descriptive statistics which shows the percentage of the response. The Pearson correlation matrix was employed to determine relationship between the variables indictors.

With the correlation coefficient of 0.323 and the p-value (0.000), food quality was statistically significant in predicting the customer loyalty, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that food quality has positive significant influence on customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. This collaborates with the findings of Al-Tit (2015) who discovered that food quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction and retention among service restaurants.

In the second hypothesis, customer value/price has a positive influence on customer patronage (r=0.055) and a p-value (0.298) greater than the level of significance (0.05). These implied that there is a positive insignificant correlation between customer value and customer patronage. Therefore an increase in the price of fastfood product/service will lead

to a very small increase customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. This is consistent with the findings of El-Adly (2019) and Rahi (2016). While El-Adly (2019) found that hedonic, price, quality, and transaction indirectly influenced customer loyalty through customer satisfaction as a mediator, Rahi (2016) customer value, and public relations perception collectively accounted for 58.0% of the variance in customer loyalty.

With the correlation coefficient of 0.152 and the p-value relatively low (0.004), indicate that the responsiveness is statistically positively significant in predicting the customer satisfaction. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that responsiveness has significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. This is consistent with the findings of Obananya (2020) who found that responsiveness, reliability, tangibility and assurance have significant influence on customer satisfaction.

Lastly, the correlation coefficient and p-value for empathy service were 0.352 and 0.000 respectively, indicating that empathy service is statistically positive and significant in predicting customer repeated purchased. This therefore leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between empathy service and customer repeated purchaseamong fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. This implies that as the level of empathy service increases, the likelihood of customers making repeated purchases also increases. Therefore the finding is consistent with the findings of Etuk*et al*(2022) who found that empathy significantly affects consumer's choice of Fast-foods.

Conclusion

The study's findings establish that food quality plays a pivotal role in predicting and influencing customer patronage among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. It can be concluded that improvements in food quality will invariably lead to an increase in customer patronage for fast food establishments.

The study effectively demonstrates that customer value, particularly in relation to price considerations, holds a positive and influential sway over customer loyalty. This reinforces the notion that customers' assessments of value in relation to the price they pay have a meaningful impact on their decisions regarding patronage. The statistically significant impact of service responsiveness on customer patronage highlights its pivotal role among fast food retail outlets in Auchi Metropolis. The study therefore concludes that the manner in which these establishments cater to customer needs and promptly address concerns has a tangible effect on customer patronage.

The study further establishes the significance of empathy service in predicting and affecting customer repeated purchase. The statistical significance observed underlines that the level of empathy exhibited by the staff at fast food outlets also plays a crucial role in influencing customer patronage in Auchi Metropolis.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward in line with the research findings:

i. Food quality was found to positively influence customer loyalty. The study therefore recommends Fast food outlets should prioritize and maintain high food quality standards to attract and retain customers.

ii. The study further recommends that Fast-Food outlets should offer competitive pricing and ensuring customers perceive value for their money can enhance customer patronage.

iii. As regard the positive effect of service responsiveness on customer satisfaction, Fast Food outlets should provide excellent customer service and promptly addressing customer needs that will significantly increase their satisfaction.

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