

# Service Reliability and Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of Service Reliability 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 (370) customers of the restaurants which was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Furthermore, three hundred and seventy-two (372) copies of structured questionnaire were administered to customers at the respective waiting lounges and halls of the restaurants while three hundred and thirty (322) were retrieved, cleaned and used for the study. Descriptively, measures of central tendencies and measures of dispersions were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics and the Spearman Rank Correlation Technique was used in testing the hypotheses postulated for the study. The result of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between service reliability and patronage of quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that service reliability significantly affects patronage of quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt. The researcher therefore recommended that the management of quick-service restaurants should regularly improve on their promised service delivery strategies in order to increase their level of customer patronage.*

## Key Words

*Service Dependability, Food Service Industry, And Customer Patronage*

## I. 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 increase in the number of fast food restaurants that crop up in every city and township in Nigeria suggests that the sector is gaining acceptance among customers (Salami and Ajobo, 2012). Supporting this assertion, Akinbola, Ogunnaike and Ojo (2013) noted that Fast Food industry in Nigeria today is a beehive of activities and is gaining a lot of attention both within and outside the country. Similarly, Adiele and Nne (2017) posited that the quick-service (aka, fast food) restaurant industry is significant and growing aspect of the overall hospitality industry. For long-term success, quick service restaurants must be perceived as offering sufficient value to customers. In order to achieve this, restaurants must first determine what consumers' value in a quick-service restaurant experience; and one of the major factors that can influence customer patronage of fast food restaurants is the restaurant perceived image.

Industry trends such as rapid outlet expansion, strategic alliances (especially with companies in downstream sector of the oil and gas industry), and entrance of foreign players amongst others lends credence to the perceived phenomenal increase in the number of fast food restaurants. Mustapha, Fakokunde and Awolusi (2014) also stated that the number of fast food outlets in Nigeria is increasing at a geometric rate and it is expected to double in five years. This proliferation is not unconnected with the general upsurge in social and economic activities. The popularity of fast food restaurant in every growing city of the world is a product of

the effect of globalization. Thus, every segment of the society now consumes fast food. Ahmed, Hossain, Malek & Begum (2008), opined that consuming fast foods has become a recent trend among upper society, teenagers and youths have also increased and the fast food has won the palate of those groups. Eating at fast food restaurants not only help customers to satisfy their hunger, but it also creates need for convenience, pleasure, entertainment, time saving, social interaction and the mood transformation. Besides, consumers experience excitement, pleasure and a sense of personal well-being in visiting fast-food restaurants.

Despite the perceived acceptance of fast-food restaurants in the Nigeria environment, customers are now beginning to be choosy in terms fast food patronage. Restaurant perceived image is considered a major factor influencing patronage in the food services sector in most Nigeria cities especially in Port-Harcourt Rivers State. The location, price, assortment, fast checkout, friendly and courteous service, and pleasant shopping environment are critical determinants or predictors of fast food patronage and these factors are crucial precursors to fast food patronage. Intuitively, the choice of consumers visiting a fast food restaurant hinges on identifiable factors peculiar to an environment which need to be ascertained. Most of the research concerning selection of a restaurant is based on identification of determinant attributes including restaurant service reliability (Bojanic, 2007).

This study was informed by the perceived growing trend of visiting fast food restaurants by individuals, households and friends in Port-Harcourt, River State. With increased competition among fast food restaurants and the growing health consciousness of customers, the customers are now becoming fastidious in the aesthetics, product and service received from fast food restaurants (Nezakati, Kuan and Asgari, 2011). A lot of studies have been carried out on fast food restaurants from different stand point and perspectives (UKessay, 2013; Carew, 2010; Park, 2004; Lowenstein, 1995) and each profiling different factors influencing customers repurchase intension (Ahmad, Ghazali and Othman,

2013; Akbar and Alaudeen, 2012). Factors ranging from food quality, Service quality, Environment, Price, Quick service (Akbar and Alaudeen, 2012; Tabassum and Rahman, 2012; Tat, Sook-Min, Ai-Chin, Rasli and Hamid, 2011), Restaurant image (Ling, Mun and Ling, 2011), and findings of the studies show different results among researchers. Thus, engendering and informing different growth policy implications. Supporting this view, Tabassum and Rahman (2012) noted that pattern of food consumption may vary due to the differences in culture, climate, socioeconomic status, etc. In fact, the habit of taking food among the inhabitants of a country may change due to several factors. However, because of these differences in the findings of scholars, it is not yet clear which factors influence or moderate customer's patronage in the area of this study. Against this background, this study investigates the effect of service reliability on Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt, River State, Nigeria.

## II. Literature Review

### Service Reliability and Patronage of Quick-Service Restaurants

Service reliability in the hospitality industry especially in the food service firms is very pivotal to their patronage and overall business performance. Restaurant service providers should be able to live up to the promise made to customers at all time. A good display and delivery of service reliability can impact significantly on customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth for an eatery. Restaurant's service reliability refers to how the company is performing and completing their promised service, and accuracy within the given set requirements between the company and the customer. Reliability is just as important as a good first impression, because every customer want to know if their supplier is reliable and fulfill the set requirements with satisfaction (Delgado & Ballester, 2004). Furthermore, if customers expect certain mode of behavior from a company and its employees, the company or restaurant should deliver it to be able to increase its level of reliability and acceptance.

Reliability is about the accuracy and timeliness in the service provided. Quick service food firms are expected to be accurate in their service delivery, be prompt at responding and attending to customer's food order and delivery. Service reliability is an important factor in restaurant's success the world over. Most customers in the hospitality industry would prefer patronizing fast food firms that are considered reliable and dependable over a long period of time. Efficient service reliability increases customer trust, loyalty, retention and positive word-of-mouth for a company. An increase in positive word-of-mouth/referral could impact significantly on restaurants patronage level (Adiele & Nne, 2017). With the continuous growth in the number of people who patronize the food offered by fast food restaurants, serving customers efficiently is a major challenge. Nowadays, customers do not simply demand for quality but they also demand for speed, reliable and dependable service.

Notably, they do not tolerate waiting in line for long period of time just to receive whatever kind of products or services unless those that are really important or more valuable than the time spent on waiting (Leoven, 2015). Through prompt delivering of service (food and beverage) customer waiting time could be reduced. Most customers of fast food firms are impatient in nature especially when they are hungry. They would prefer to be served exactly at the time promised by the waiter or waitress of the restaurant. In

the delivery of services, it is very essential to emphasize that the process of service delivery is as important to the customer as the actual service. The faster, reliable and dependable the service, the more satisfied the customers will become, and this may lead to retention, loyalty and ultimately improve patronage of the fast food firms. From the foregoing discussion the author could affirm that service reliability is a vital attribute or component of

### III. Research Methodology

Ontologically, this study took a realist view and a positivist epistemology. It therefore adopted 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 comprises ten thousand (10,000) 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 Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for a finite population. Primary data were drawn from three hundred and thirty-two (322) retrieved copies of structured questionnaire; which were cleaned, qualified and used for the study. The measures of central tendencies and dispersions were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics while the hypothesis was tested by employing the Spearman Rank Correlation Technique (SRCT) with the aid of the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The research instrument adopted the Likert scale method in the measurement of service reliability constructs and Patronage which ranges 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 50 students and lecturers who are 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 researcher also used the Cronbach's Alpha technique to ascertain the reliability and internal consistency of the measurement instrument. In order to ensure content validity, items measuring service reliability including provision for menu varieties, accurate amount of money paid for beverage and food, restaurant performs and keeps to their promised service etc. were adapted from Kimet *al* (2009), Customer patronage was measured by items including repeat purchase behavior and customer retention which were adapted from Sulek and Hensley (2004).

### IV. Test of Hypotheses, Data Presentation and Result

This section is concerned with the analysis and presentation of the results for the empirical assessment of the effect of service

reliability on patronage of Quick –Service Restaurants in Port-Harcourt

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** Service reliability does not have any significant effect on repeat purchase behaviour in quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Test for Correlation between Service Reliability and Repeat Purchase Behaviour

			Reliability	Repeat
Spearman's rho	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.677**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
	Repeat	Correlation Coefficient	.677**	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 1. indicates that the relationship between service reliability and customer repeat purchase behaviour is considered significant. The data showed that service reliability impacts significantly on customer repeat purchase behaviour (where rho = .677 and P < 0.05). The evidence suggests that service reliability is a significant antecedent of patronage which is measured by customer repeat purchase behaviour. Hence on the basis of the result, the hypothesis (HO<sub>1</sub>) is rejected.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** Service reliability does not have any significant effect on customer retention in quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Test for Correlation between Service Reliability and Customer Retention

			Reliability	Retention
Spearman's rho	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.623**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	332	332
	Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.623**	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. indicates that the relationship between service reliability and customer retention is considered significant. The result revealed that service reliability impacts significantly on customer retention (where rho = .623 and P < 0.05). The evidence entails that service reliability is a significant precursor of customer retention. Hence on the basis of the result, hypothesis (HO<sub>2</sub>) is rejected

## V. 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:

### Service reliability and Repeat purchase behaviour

The test of hypothesis one (Ho<sub>1</sub>) as depicted in table 1. revealed a significant relationship between service reliability and repeat purchase behaviour. The relationship was observed to be significant at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that service reliability which indicates or reflects dependability as a result of consistency is a significant antecedent of repeat purchase behaviour. The findings of the study align with those of Alam and Khokhar (2006) who affirmed that organizations with high reliability and dependability ratings have a tendency to sustain and keep their customer base. The result also suggests that through reliability employees can effectively gain the trust and confidence of their customers. This finding further corroborated the views of Ehigie (2006). With the continuous growth in the number of people who patronize the food offered by fast food restaurants, serving customers efficiently is a major challenge. Nowadays, customers do not simply demand for quality but they also demand for speed, reliable and dependable service.

More so, customers do not tolerate waiting in line for long period of time just to receive whatever kind of products or services unless those that are really important or more valuable than the time spent on waiting (Leoven, 2015). As such, this answers the research question which sought to ascertain the nature of the relationship between the variables; hence the study finds that service reliability contributes significantly to repeat purchase behaviour in quick-service restaurants.

Based on the foregoing discussions, and from the review of empirical and relevant literature, it seems that a relationship exists between service reliability and repeat purchase behaviour in quick service restaurants. The author also agrees with the views of previous researchers that service reliability is a determinant of repeat purchase behaviour in quick service restaurants in Port-Harcourt

### Service reliability and Customer Retention

The test of hypothesis two (Ho<sub>2</sub>) as depicted in table 2. revealed a significant relationship between service reliability and customer retention. The relationship was observed to be significant at a 0.05 level of significance. The finding validates the views of (Delgado & Ballester, 2004) that service Reliability influences retention in business; and that it is just as important as a good first impression, because every customer want to know if their supplier is reliable and fulfill the set requirements with satisfaction. Furthermore, if customers expect certain mode of behaviour from a company and its employees, the company or restaurant should deliver it to be able to increase its level of customer reliability and acceptance.

Reliability is about the accuracy and timeliness in the service provided. Quick service food firms are expected to be accurate in their service delivery, be prompt at responding and attending to customer's food order and delivery. Service reliability is an important factor in restaurant's success the world over. Most customers in the hospitality industry would prefer patronizing fast food firms that are considered reliable and dependable over a long period of time. Efficient service reliability increases customer trust, loyalty, retention and positive word-of-mouth for a company. An increase in positive word-of-mouth/referral could impact significantly on restaurants patronage level.

The faster, reliable and dependable the service, the more satisfied

the customers will become, and this could lead to retention, loyalty and ultimately improve patronage of the fast food firms. From the foregoing discussion the author could affirm that service reliability is a vital precursor to customer retention in quick service restaurants in Port-Harcourt.

## VI. Conclusion

In today's fast competitive 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. 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. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between service reliability and patronage of quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study presumed that service reliability 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 service reliability is a major determinant of quick service restaurants patronage and that it also has a great influence on customer satisfaction and overall dining experience. Based on the findings obtained from the test of hypotheses therefore, the author concluded that service reliability significantly affects fast food restaurant patronage. Hence, the researcher recommended that food service firms in Port Harcourt should constantly improve on promised service delivery strategies in order to increase their level of patronage.

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