

Influence of Service Quality on Guest Repeat Patronage in Fast Food Operation in Asaba, Delta State

Abamba, Emmanuel Monday

Department of Hospitality Management
School of Management and Applied Sciences
NATIONBUILDER POLYTECHNIC ASABA
emmanuelmonday32@gmail.com

Onuzulike, Anita Chioma

Department of Hospitality Management
School of Management and Applied Sciences
NATIONBUILDER POLYTECHNIC ASABA
Chiomaanita659@gmail.com

Anyanwu, Dominic Ebere, Ph.D

Department of Tourism Management Technology
School of Applied Sciences and Technology
Auchi Polytechnic Auchi Edo State

Emechete, Ngozi Lucy

Department of Hospitality Management
School of Management and Applied Sciences
NATIONBUILDER POLYTECHNIC ASABA
emechetengozilucy@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study focused on influence of service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation in Asaba, Delta State. The objectives of the study are; to identify the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations, to determine the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operations and to identify the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations. To achieve the objective of the study, survey research design was adopted. The population for the study is customers in the selected fast food outlets in Asaba, Delta State. However, the population of customers is infinite. The sample size is 196 after adopting infinite formula. The data were collected using structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability are the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations. The findings also revealed that there is high level of application of empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability in fast food operations. Therefore, restaurant managers

must consider these elements to attract more loyal customers. The study also recommends that customers' expectation has a significant effect on the customers' perceived service quality and customers' loyalty. Managers of the restaurants can affect their current and potential customers by adopting new strategies to keep them more satisfied and loyal to their restaurants.

Keywords: *Service quality, Guest repeat patronage, Reliability, Tangibility, responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy*

1.0 Introduction

Service quality has ushered as one of the most critical success factors towards growth and survival of service firms. High service quality to customer offers a firm a competitive advantage in competitive markets (Berry et al., 2014). Perception of quality with respect to a service is difficult to frame due to intangible and heterogeneous attributes associated with the same. Perceived service quality has been observed as an attitude towards interpreting superiority of the service (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2010). Hotel managers used to believe that the best marketing strategy was to have as many new customers as possible (Berry, 2015). They recognized the importance of satisfying the guests, but the main goal was to continue finding new customers (the marketing conquest). Nowadays, this marketing strategy is not enough for a successful business. It is more important to promote customers' satisfaction and retention and to guarantee customer loyalty (Berry, 2015). Customer satisfaction is a way of ensuring the financial stability of the organization on the long term. Knowing how satisfied customers are has two main objectives: (i) to ensure business continuity (repeated purchase and loyalty), and (ii) to assess the customer reaction when the quality of service changes (Best, 2009). Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation to gain customer retention and customer loyalty (Gruen, 2015). Although this is important in all areas of the tourism and lodging industry, the fulfillment of customers' expectations for upscale luxury hotel services are essential to keep the customers satisfied and returning (Harris & Goode, 2014). However, measurement of client satisfaction in upscale hotels has not been targeted specifically by marketing, consumer's psychology scales and measuring instruments. Scales developed for other tertiary services, like the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 2015) have been applied to the hotel industry. Nevertheless, the validity of the data gathered with these scales has been criticized because the scales' dimensionality is not universal and depends on the type of service examined. Furthermore, service quality in the hotel industry is intangible, as opposed to the tangibility of product quality (Ndubuisi, 2014) making it difficult to apply these scales, which were developed for evaluating the quality of tangible products, to the hotel business. Service quality can be used to differentiate between two service provider's services and to win strategic competitive advantage. The service quality delivered is a key determinant of overall satisfaction, which in turn leads to customer repeat patronage and loyalty (Ndubuisi, 2017). Service quality is considered one of the most significant antecedent of customer loyalty in service industries. The quality of transactions between service provider and customer may improve the fast food customer relationship into a long-term, closer and trustful relationship. Service quality has been important primary competitive tool for fast food industry to achieve success in the market place with commonly undifferentiated services. Delivering quality service to customers is a must for success and survival in today's competitive hospitality. Service quality has drawn attention of researchers and managers in recent decades (Zeithaml, 2010). It has become a significant subject because of its

impact on customer repeat patronage. By satisfying customers through high quality service, business firms not only retain their current customers, but also increase their market share (Finn and Lamb, 2011). Service quality is widely recognized as being a critical determinant for the success of an organization in today's competitive environment. Any decline in customer satisfaction due to poor service quality would be a matter of concern. "Consumers being more aware of rising standards in service, prompted by competitive trends, have developed higher expectations" (Marshall et al., 2018). For Parasuraman et al. (2010), service quality is both the significant differentiator and the most aggressive weapon possessed by many leading service organizations. It has been discovered that leading service organizations endeavor to sustain a superior quality of service over their competitors in an effort to acquire and retain customer loyalty. This is based on the concept where the service organizations' ability to expand and maintain a large and loyal customer base is essential for their long-term success in a market. In the face of such critical importance of customer repeat patronage being vital for business survival, it is rather strange that the relationships between service quality and customer repeat patronage are not equally well-developed. Parasuraman et al. (2010) provided factors of service quality including tangible, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness and used a model labeled as SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL model has been frequently modified overtime. For example, Yi (2010) exploited the SERVQUAL technique to identify a gap between the customers' expectation of service quality and the service provided. Churchill (2019) used the modified SERVQUAL to realize whether the customers were more interested in the intangible service qualities or the tangible ones. Yu et al. (2015) indicated that responsiveness, tangible, the location, reputation, a prompt courteous service, friendly hospitality, and meal service are the most central factors for which the customers would desire to revisit a restaurant.

Despite the importance of service quality to customer loyalty, most fast food establishments do not maintain quality service. Most of them do not bother training their staff on quality service delivery and all these have made consumers to keep switching to their competitors. In most cases consumers complain of delay in service, arrogance from staff, poor relationship management among others. A dissatisfied customer will likely complain, engage in negative word of mouth and switch to a competitor. Research has shown that 30 percent of fast food establishments ceases operation after five years of commencement this is as a result of low patronage which is attributed to poor service delivery that results to consumer switching to the competitors. Despite extensive research on the dimensions of perceived service quality in hospitality industry in developed economies using the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (2010), little has been done in developing countries and in particular in Abia State. The SERVQUAL instrument is a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and has been widely accepted as a valid instrument in the measurement of perceived service quality. It comprises of five service quality dimensions: reliability, tangibility, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. Most studies have been conducted in developed economies but not much has been done in the Nigeria and in Abia State specifically. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to examine the influence of service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation in Asaba, Delta State. Other specific objectives include:

- (i) To identify the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations.
- (ii) To determine the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operations.
- (iii) To identify the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Review

Service Quality

Quality can be defined as satisfying or exceeding customer requirements and expectations, and consequently to some extent it is the customer who eventually judges the quality of a product (Shen *et al.*, 2010). According to Gilbert & Veloutsou (2016), service quality has been considered as one of the significant aspects for the organization's success because of its proximity with customer satisfaction notably in the service industry. Moreover, for gaining better excellence in the field of hospitality business, businessmen & women who are involved in this business must concentrate on quality service. It can differentiate from one to another. It is also regarded as an element for the hotel industry's success and performance (Min, Min & Chung, 2012). Quality of service has been thought to have an absolute impact on customers' gratification, the tendency towards the repeat purchase behavior and ensuring the company's long-term profit as well. (Wilkins, Meerilees & Herington, 2017). Continuous communication with personnel and an analysis of service encounters are mandatory for ensuring the better service quality of an organization (Prayuhda & Harsanto, 2014).

Parasuraman *et al.* (2018) defined service quality as the capability of the organization to comply with customer expectation. Lewis and Booms (2013) viewed service quality as an analogy between expectations and performance. Kotler (2013) defined, a service is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and doesn't result in the ownership of anything. It may also be outlined as an offer that is intangibly provided by one party to another party in exchange for money. (Solomon, 2009). Quality explains as the combination of features of goods or services that promise to satisfy the stated or implied needs of customers. (Kotler *et al.*, 2012). Parasuraman *et al.* (2018) developed the "SERVQUAL model" to measure service quality along five dimensions such as "reliability, tangible, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy". This model welcomes and the most popular in the service industry. Most of the researchers used this model to identify the gap between customer expectation and customer perception and basically it is used how to ensure better service quality. In addition to this, other researches also confirmed that "SERVQUAL instrument" is noteworthy in the tourism industry (Fick and Ritchie, 2011; Shaikh and Khan, 2011). Though this model can be applied in many industries, it is also criticized on several grounds. (Cronin and Taylor, 2012). However, all researchers do not unanimously accept this model to measure service quality. In the service, where production, delivery and consumption can occur simultaneously, the concept of quality refers to the matching between what customers expect and what they experience. Customers evaluate service quality by comparing what they want or expect to what they actually get or perceive they are getting (Berry *et al.*, 2018). Service Quality Service quality involves a comparison of expectations with performance. According to Zeithaman & Bitner (2013) service quality is a measure of how well a delivered service matches the customers' expectations. Hospitality s have realized the significance of concentrating on quality of services as an approach to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, and to develop their core competence and business performance (Kunst and Lemmink, 2010) In this study, service quality has been defined as the difference between customers expectation for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perception of the service received. Customer's expectation serves as a foundation for evaluating service quality because, quality is high when performance exceeds expectation and quality is low when performance does not meet their expectation (Asubonteng *et al.*, 2016). Expectation is viewed in service quality literature as desires or wants of consumer i.e., what they

feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Parasuraman et al., 2018). Perceived service is the outcome of the consumer's view of the service dimensions, which are both technical and functional in nature. The customer's total perception of a service is based on his/her perception of the outcome and the process; the outcome is either value added or quality and the process is the role undertaken by the customer. Parasuraman et al, (2018) define perceived quality as a form of attitude, related but not equal to satisfaction, and results from a consumption of expectations with perceptions of performance. Therefore, having a better understanding of consumers attitudes will help know how they perceive service quality in grocery stores. Negi (2009) suggests that customer-perceived service quality has been given increased attention in recent years, due to its specific contribution to business competitiveness, developing satisfied and loyal customers. This makes service quality a very important construct to understand by firms by knowing how to measure it and making necessary improvements in its dimensions where appropriate especially in areas where gaps between expectations and perceptions are wide. Douglas & Connor (2013), found that the consumer who has developed heightened perception of quality has become more demanding and less tolerant of assumed shortfalls in service quality and identify the intangible elements (inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability) of a service as the critical determinants of service quality perceived by a customer. It is very vital to note here that, service quality is not only assessed as the end results but also on how it is delivered during service process and its ultimate effect on consumer's perceptions (Douglas & Connor, 2013). The ability to provide a quality service will, therefore, improve a commercial hospitality s' ability to increase market share and profitability, whilst at the same time reducing their existing customer's switching propensity to another institution. Thus, the ability to consistently provide a high-quality service offering may well act as a key strategic differentiator. Furthermore, successful organizations perusing quality have realized that quality improvements must be focused where most productive (Keiningham, et al., 2015). Improved quality has a three-fold pay-off; namely reduced costs, increased customer retention, and attracting new customers drawn to the quality service provider (Keiningham *et al.*, 2015). In order to achieve service quality, it is important to identify key service expectations and focus efforts at the most beneficial point in the customer

Dimensions of Service Quality

According to Zeithamal (2009), Services Quality is described as SERVQUAL by five dimensions constructs namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Basically, these dimensions represent the consumer's criteria of judging service quality. The service quality dimensions identified Zeithamal (2009) are explained below:

1. Reliability

The reliability construct in the SERVQUAL model represents the service provider's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. This is achieved through keeping promises to do something, providing right service, consistency of performance and dependability, service is performed right at the first time, the company keeps its promises in accuracy in billing and keeping records correctly, available merchandise and error-free sales transactions and records. Reliability also consists of accurate order fulfillment; accurate record; accurate quote; accurate in billing; accurate calculation of commissions; keep services promise. He also mentioned that reliability is the most important factor in hospitality services (Yang *et al.*, 2013). The higher customers appreciate on reliability, the higher the overall evaluation of retail

service quality is (Ndubisi, 2016).

2. Tangibility

Tangibility relates to the physical aspects or evidence of a service. Physical aspects of retailer include appearance of equipment and fixtures, physical facilities, materials associated with the service, appearance of personnel and communication materials, Convenience of physical facilities and layouts. In addition to the appearance of the facilities, it also takes into account the convenience offered the customer by the layout of physical facilities (Ananth et al,2011). The higher customers appreciate on the physical aspects, the higher the overall evaluation of retail service quality is (Bellini et al., 2015).

Angur et al (2019) found that business premises should have a high standard of decoration and a nice environment to positively influence service quality which will consequently lead to customer loyalty. The physical service setting is a very important tangible factor that influences service quality perceptions. For instance, Bitner (2012) focused on the elements under the control of businesses at the point of interaction between customers and the firm, arguing that these controllable elements can affect perceptions of service quality and encourage repeat patronage. Bitner (2012) proposed that the physical setting of the place of service, including not only visual aspects such as color and texture, but also noise, odors, and temperature is of particular importance and capable of altering customer expectations and strongly influencing consumer responses and satisfaction. Bitner (2012) called the combined physical and sensory elements of the place of service the service scape.

Wakefield and Blodgett (2016) also found that servicescape in terms of layout, aesthetics, electronic displays, seating, and cleanliness on consumers' perceptions of service quality has a relatively consistent and strong effect on customer retention and their repeat patronage. They noted that the strongest element in the perception of service quality was the "aesthetic appeal of the facility architecture and décor," remarking that customers' first impressions of the facilities influence their overall assessment of the services. Bonn and Mathews (2017) also found substantial evidence that the design of the physical setting and its associated sensory attributes can have a significant effect on customer satisfaction and on a customer's re-patronage decisions. The professional appearance of staff is an important means of tangibilizing the intangible service products. Furthermore, the tangibles of a service or service provider can be represented by the physical appearance of employees and other physical infrastructures. This has also seen the introduction of a dress code or uniform for hospitality employees across the country (Kim & Jin, 2012).

3. Assurance

The assurance construct consists of competence (possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service), courtesy (consideration for the customer's property, clean and neat appearance of public contact personnel), credibility and security of the employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. According to Sadek et al. (2010), in British hospitality s assurance means the polite and friendly staff, provision of financial advice, interior comfort, eases of access to account information and knowledgeable and experienced management team. This includes employees having knowledge to answer questions, inspiring confidence, providing prompt service, willing to respond to customer's requests, giving customers individual attention, showing consistent courtesy with customers and even treat customers properly on the phone. Several studies suggest that the exchange of information is an important part of both traditional

selling and relationship marketing which may lead to a shared understanding (Ndubisi, 2016; Lymperopoulos et al., 2016). The higher customers appreciate personal interaction, the higher the overall evaluation of retail service quality is.

This dimension concerns how knowledgeable and courteous employees are to inspire confidence and trust from their customers. The assurance attributes are all very much about the extent to which a consumer trusts a provider and whether or not they have the confidence in an organization to provide a service securely and competently.

There is a substantial level of trust in the hospitality industry and its abilities were necessary to make the consumer comfortable enough to establish a hospitality relationship. Parasuraman, et al (2011) included actions by employees such as always courteous, behavior instills confidence, and knowledge as prime elements of assurance.

On the aspect of the feeling of safety when transacting with the hospitality industry, customers are concerned or interested in security issues regarding on-line, credit card, internet etc transactions. Security and safety are ranked highly in measuring service quality and consequently customer loyalty. Customers have high expectations regarding feeling safe and secure whilst making transactions. This may be attributed to the nature of the services provided by hospitality s. Customers face much greater risk in terms of fraud and identity theft in hospitality industry. This may explain the fact that hospitality s do all they can to assure their customers that transactions with their organizations are safe and secure on whether employees always instill confidence in their fast food customers, it is important to acknowledge the fact that customers want to trust and have confidence in the competence of the service provider's employees to deliver the service. The customer will not be satisfied if he/she does not feel assured about the competence of the service provider. Kumar et al. (2010) and Lai (2014) found that confidence is one of the important factors for assurance. As confidence in one's impressions about the firm increases (Verhoef et al., 2012), trust develops between the parties (Gwinner et al., 2018), and the cost of switching firm rises (Shapiro and Varian, 1999). Moreover, customers weigh prior cumulative satisfaction heavily when they are deciding whether to maintain or terminate their relationship with the fast food industry (Bolton, 2018). These aspects favor the continuity of the relationship, so that we can expect a greater propensity to switch.

4. Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the determinant that defines the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt services. It is the desire and willingness to assist customers and deliver prompt service. It involves features such as the opening hours of the service provider, the politeness of the employees and the time the customer has to wait in order to get the service. In other words, it describes how quickly and affective the response to the customer is. Willingness to help customers is likely to have an important and positive effect on customer' perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in fast food industry. Mengi (2009) also found that responsiveness is positively related to service quality and customer satisfaction.). It is also involves understanding needs and wants of the customers, convenient operating hours, individual attention given by the staff, attention to problems and customers" safety in their transaction (Kumar *et al.*, 2010).

Mohammed and Shirley (2009) found that hospitality services such as prompt communication to the customer are vital. Customers are concerned whether their fast food industry will provide the right information to the right customers promptly. This is creates public confidence, and thus helps customers to make the right decisions at the right time. Responsiveness is likely to have an

important and positive effect on customer satisfaction (Glaveli et al., 2016). The higher customers appreciate problem solving, the higher overall evaluation of retail service quality is.

5. Empathy

The last dimension of the SERVQUAL model is empathy. Empathy is the caring and personalized attention the organization provides its customers. It is reflected in the service provider's provision of access, communication and understanding the customer. Individual attention, convenient operating hours, understanding of the staff when a problem occurs and the knowledge the employees have of the customers' needs were the primary elements included in the evaluation of empathy. This dimension captures aspects of service quality that are directly influenced by service provider's policy such as good customer service, convenience of parking and operating hours (Butcher, 2011; Ndubisi, 2016; Ehigie, 2016). The degree to which the customer feels the empathy will cause the customer to either accept or reject the service encounter. The higher the level of empathy, the higher the overall evaluation of retail service quality is.

The aspects that are critical in empathy include employees' knowledge to respond to customer requests or needs. Hospitality industry invests heavily on staff training so as to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with their customers. On the employees' personal attention to their customers, marketing literature indicates that service providers that provide individualized attention to their customers increase their level of perceived service quality. This is due to the high intangibility of the service and the heterogeneity of it results in an increased focus on the interaction process. This means that employees must be skilled enough to be able to immediately recognize the needs of the customers are critical in order to improve service quality

Impact of Service quality on customer repeat patronage

According to Lai, Griffin & Babin (2009) loyalty is one of the main determinants of long-term financial growth in an organization. Service quality is also linked with customer repeat patronage. While some researchers are in the view that customer, satisfaction rather than service quality exerts stronger influences on buying intentions of the customers (Cronin and Taylor, 2012). Some other researchers also provided the strong empirical evidences supporting the fact that service quality increases the customer intentions to remain with any company. For example, Buzzell and Gale (2017) found out that service quality results in increased market share and repeated sales that ultimately leads to customer loyalty. Zeithaml et al. (2008) also concluded in their research that when organizations improve the quality of their services, customers' unfavorable intentions are decreased while favorable behavioral intentions are increased. Traditional service systems are still demanded by the customers along with the internet-based hospitality (Yang and Fang, 2014).

Service quality might be found to have a direct impact on customer loyalty (Boulding et al., 2013; Parasuraman et al., 2008). Cronin and Taylor (2012) hypothesize that perceived service quality positively affects consumers' loyalty. Reichheld and Sasser (2010), Cronin et al. (2010) and Kang and James (2014) found that good service quality leads to the retention of existing customers and the attraction of new ones, reduced costs, an enhanced corporate image, positive word-of-mouth recommendation and, ultimately, enhanced profitability. A research by Zeithaml et al. (2009) concluded that when organizations enhance the quality of their services, customers' favorable behavioral intentions are increased while unfavorable intentions are decreased simultaneously.

Service quality has been found to have considerable impact in determining repeat purchase and customer loyalty (Jones and Farquhar, 2013). As pointed out by Bolton (2018), service quality influences a customer's subsequent behavior, intentions and preferences. When a customer chooses a provider that delivers service quality that meets or exceeds his or her expectations, he or she is more than likely choose the same provider again. Besides, Cronin and Taylor (2014) also found that service quality has a significant effect on repurchase intentions. Other studies which support that repurchase intentions are positively influenced by service quality include Zeithaml et al (2009)

It is well known that evaluative judgments of service quality could significantly influence service loyalty and hospitality loyalty (Veloutsou et al., 2014). Ruyter et al. (2018) also found a positive relationship between perceived service quality and preference loyalty and price indifference loyalty. Velotsou et al. (2014) also found that perceived service quality has a positive association with customer loyalty, being defined as a function of expected quality (generated from market communication, image, word of mouth and customer needs) and experienced quality (generated from functional and technical quality).

Perceived quality reflects the opinion of the customer regarding the superiority or global excellence of a product or service. According to Venetis & Ghauri (2014), service quality is regarded as one of the few means of services differentiation, attracting new customers and increasing market share. It is also viewed as an important means of customer retention. The lifetime value of a loyal customer can be astronomical, especially when referrals are added to the economics of customer retention and repeat purchases of related products (Heskett *et al*, 2014). In one case, a retail hospitality that increased its customer retention rates by 5 per cent increased its profits by 85 per cent (Reichheld & Sasser, 2010). The cost of gaining a new customer is about five times greater than the cost of retaining a current customer through the use of relationship marketing.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) suggested that human behavior is determined by intention to perform the behavior, which is affected jointly by attitude toward behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991, 2002). Attitude (ATT) is the general feeling of people about the desirability or undesirability of a specific behavior. Subjective norm (SN) expresses the perceived organizational or social pressure of a person who intends to perform a particular behavior. Perceived behavioral control (PBC) reflects a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of implementing a particular behavior.

The ability of TBP in providing a useful theoretical framework for understanding and predicting the acceptance of new information systems is demonstrated (Ajzen, 2002). Armitage and Conner (2001) analysed previous studies using the TBP in a meta-analysis study. The major conclusion was support for the efficacy of the TPB and the suggestion that more work on new variables is needed to increase the predictability of the model.

TPB further provides a framework to examine the influence of attitudes on behaviours. For example, if an individual believes that the outcome of the behaviour is positive, she/he will possess a positive attitude toward performing it. That is when the customer believes that the final result of the switching action is positive, he/she will have a positive attitude towards switching. The central factor in the TPB model is the individual's intention to perform a given behaviour. Attitude is the most important determinant of a customer's switching intention, attitude was

influence by subjective norms, and switching intention was influenced by satisfaction which in turn influences significantly the switching behaviour of customers. The more an individual believes he/she possesses the necessary resources, abilities and opportunities necessary to influence behaviour, the more likely he/she will intend to and actually perform the behaviour. Consumers are susceptible to interpersonal influences which had been accommodated in the theory of planned behaviour.

Empirical Review

Al Bassam (2013), examined the determinants of service quality in hospitality services, the Case Study of Internet Hospitality Services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". The research study proposes a revised and modified SERVQUAL model which incorporates several variables that reflects the industry-specific attributes of Internet hospitality services. A survey-based research is used to collect primary data on the basis of Internet hospitality services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A multiple regression analysis is employed to examine the influence of the adapted determinants on service quality. . Focus-group interviews are also conducted as a follow-up to the questionnaire study. The findings of both fieldworks indicate that reliability, responsiveness, website design, and personalization determine service quality in the Internet hospitality context. The study presents the main findings derived from the research model which can be used by a wide range of financial institutions, which make use of the Internet in their business dealings, to support each organization's decision-making processes. Also, the model can be used as a blueprint for an organization's strategic planning.

Nsour (2013), examined the impact of Using Relationship Marketing Strategies on Customers Loyalty: Study on STC Customers in Riyadh – KSA. The study aims to determine the relationship between relational bonds (financial, social structural) of Saudi Telecommunication Company & loyalty of Saudi customers, as well as determine the statistical differences in the loyalty of Saudi customers according to education, sex and income. The study sample consists of 500 customers, and convenience sample is used. Study results proved that there is no statistical relationship between social bonds offered by STC, and between Saudi customer loyalties to this company. On contrary, it has been found that strategies which focus on financial and structural factors were a key factor in obtaining Saudi customer loyalty for company and its services, it was also found that there are statistically differences in this loyalty level due to income level, and gender, while no differences were found due to customer educational level.

Sadeghloo et al (2013), investigated the relationship between internal marketing and service quality. The research method in this study was descriptive and correlation method. Sports and Youth offices staff of Golestan province have established statistical population of research that they all participated in the study (N=180). Reliability of questionnaires after a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha test, respectively ($\alpha=0.84$) and ($\alpha=0.88$) were obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods for data analysis were used. The findings showed that between internal marketing and service quality in sports and youth offices staff, there is significant positive correlation ($r=0.547$, $p<0.001$). The research findings on the importance of internal marketing and its levels as one of the factors affecting service quality within the sports and youth offices of Golestan province underlined. Thus, leaders and HR managers should use the strategic plans for the development of internal marketing in order to provide higher quality services.

Abu Elsamen & Alsurideh (2012), examined the impact of Internal Marketing (IM) on the Perceived Internal Service Quality (ISQ). Data was collected from 225 employees working in a

Jordanian Pharmaceutical company. Our results indicated that there is a positive relationship between Internal Marketing dimensions and perceived Internal Service Quality in varying magnitude. Further, the investigation showed that the dominant dimension of IM was found to be Recruitment with the stronger impact on all perceived internal service. Service providers are recommended to apply IM strategy in order to enhance perceived ISQ foster better external service quality.

Al-Aali et al (2011), carried out a study on "Measuring the Service Quality of Mobile Phone Companies in Saudi Arabia". The purpose of the study is to measure the service quality of mobile phone companies operating in a developing country, Saudi Arabia by using the SERVQUAL instrument. Confirmatory factor analysis and MANOVA were applied to test the results. The adapted SERVQUAL instrument is a helpful tool in measuring service quality. Results based upon factor analysis exhibited significant differences in customers' perceptions of the overall service quality of various companies. Two added dimensions of network quality and competitive advantage also showed significant results. There was a difference of perception between male and female subscribers concerning quality dimensions. This research is a valuable contribution to existing literature on service quality in Saudi Arabia with special reference to mobile phone companies. It also reveals clear differentiation in customers' preferences in almost all dimensions.

3.0 Methodology

For the purpose of achieving the objectives of the study, a survey research design was used through administration of questionnaire and personal interview. Survey research method is important in this kind of research because it has the ability to clearly explain and organize complex phenomenon in a simpler and understandable form.

The population for the study is customers in the selected fast food outlets in Asaba, Delta State. However, the population of customers is infinite.

To arrive at the sample size, Cochran's (1977) formula was used. This is used when population size is infinite. Thus, the formula is given as;

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

where, n = population size

z = the value of standard variate at a given confidence level and to be worked out from table showing area under normal curve.

p = sample proportion

q = 1-p

e = given precision rate or acceptable error

Now putting the value in the formula for infinite population, we get:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

where,

z = 1.96 (desired confidence level is 95% and value obtained from table)

p = 0.5 (sample proportion).

Q = 0.5 {(1-0.5) i.e 1-p}

e = 7% or 0.07 (precision rate or acceptable error)

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (0.5) \cdot (0.5)}{0.07^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(0.07)^2}{0.0049} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0049}$$

n = 196 Respondents

Therefore, the population size of the study is 196 customers.

The researcher made use of the questionnaire and personal interview in obtaining the needed information from the respondents. The questionnaire will contain two sections (section A and section B). Section A contained respondents' personal data while section B contained structured questions relating to objectives of the study. The questionnaire was designed in four point rating scale close ended questions. Closed ended questions were used because the questions do not required respondents to give more than one word answer. Also, the questions are structured questions. The close ended includes;

SA = strongly agreed, = 4

A = Agreed, = 3

D = disagreed, = 2

SD = Strongly disagreed = 1

$$\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.5$$

Mean value of 2.5 and above is acceptable.

Personal interview will also be conducted. Here the researcher met with the customers of the selected fast food outlets. Questions relating to the subject matter were asked. The responses helped the researcher in carrying out this research especially in the area of analysis and decision making.

The simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze respondents' personal data and research questions. Also, the regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

Decision rule:

Accept the null hypothesis if the coefficient of determination (r^2) is less than 50% otherwise reject null hypothesis and accept alternation.

Based on research questions, mean value above or equal to 2.5 is acceptable where there is 4-point likert scale.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Results

Question 1: What are the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations?

Table 1 Mean responses of respondents on the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations?

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remark
1	Empathy	110(64%)	50(29%)	12(7%)	0	172	614	3.57	Accept
2	Responsiveness	100(58%)	52(30%)	20(12%)	0	172	596	3.47	Accept
3	Assurance	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accept
4	Tangibility	120(70%)	42(24%)	10(6%)	0	172	626	3.64	Accept
5	Reliability	88(51%)	58(34%)	26(15%)	0	172	578	3.36	Accept
						Grand	Mean	3.50	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result on the mean responses of respondents on the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations presented on table 1 shows that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability are the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations. All the items had an acceptable mean response score of 2.5. Items 4 has the highest mean of 3.64 followed by item 1 with mean of 3.57 and then item 6 with mean of 3.51. Hence, item 7 has the lowest mean of 2.64. This implies that there is high level of tangibility in fast food operations.

Objective 2: What is the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation?

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondents on the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remark
1	Empathy influences quest repeat patronage	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12(7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accept
2	Responsiveness influences quest repeat patronage	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accept
3	Assurance influences quest repeat patronage	110(64%)	50(29%)	12(7%)	0	172	614	3.57	Accept
4	Tangibility influences quest repeat patronage	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12(7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accept
5	Reliability influences quest repeat patronage	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accept

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, U= undecided D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result resented on Table 2 shows the mean responses of the respondents based on the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation. The result shows that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability influence quest repeat patronage. All the items had mean responses above 2.5. This implies that service quality influence quest repeat patronage in fast food operation.

Question 3: What are the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations?

Table 3 Mean responses of the respondents on the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations?

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	M	Remark
1	Training	88(51%)	58(34%)	26 15%)	0	172	578	3.36	Accept
2	Qualification	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12 (7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accept
3	Attitude	96(54.5%)	60(35%)	18(10.5%)	0	172	592	3.44	Accept
4	Reward and compensation	100(58%)	40(23%)	20(12%)	12 (7%)	172	572	3.33	Accept

5	Internal conflict	90(52%)	70(41%)	12 (7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accept
						Grand	Mean	3.40	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, U= undecided, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result presented on Table 3 shows the mean response of the respondents on the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations. The result indicated that training, qualification, attitude, reward and compensation and internal conflict are the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations. The items have mean values of 3.36, 3.40, 3.44, 3.33 and 3.45 respectively. All the items had mean responses above the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that the above items are the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

H0₁: Service quality has no significant influence on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation.

Table 5: Analysis of the influence of Service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation.

Variables	Coefficients	Standard error	t-statistics	P-value
Intercept	7259.23	7980.95	1.025636	0.03003
Empathy	245.6140	170.816	2.28653	0.02430
Responsiveness	4109.608	1022.03	3.673595	0.00037
Assurance	1902.899	301.113	6.831189	0.03310
Tangibility	0.005499	0.01002	0.748563	0.01576
Reliability	-0.187134	0.05474	-3.546441	0.00058
F-ratio	21.00532			
R-square	0.813330			
Adjusted R-square	0.781045			
P-value	0.00000			

The regression result shows the influence of service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation. The coefficient of determination R-square of 0.813 implied that 81.3% of the sample variation in the dependent variable (quest repeat patronage) is explained or caused by the explanatory variables (empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability) while 18.7% is unexplained. This remaining 18.7% could be caused by other factors or variables not built into the model. The value of R-square is an indication of a relationship between the dependent variable (quest repeat patronage) and independent variable (empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability). The value of the adjusted R² is 0.781. This shows that the regression line which captures 78.1 per cent of the total variation in (quest repeat patronage) is caused by variation in the explanatory variables (empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability) specified in the model with less than 21.9 per cent accounted for the stochastic error term. The F-statistic was also used to test the overall significant of the model. The F-value of 21.00532 is an indication that the model is statistically significant at 5 percent level of significant at degree of freedom df1= 1 and df2= 3.

The probability value of 0.00000 is less than 0.05 the null hypotheses is rejected and we therefore conclude that service quality has a significant influence on guest repeat patronage in fast food

operation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study presented on table 1 shows that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability are the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations. The findings of this study is in line with that of Zeithamel (2009), which revealed similar items as the dimension of service quality in fast food operations. Consequently, the findings of Ndubisi (2016), revealed the above items as dimensions of service quality in fast food operations.

The result on table 2 shows that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability influence quest repeat patronage. The finding is consistent to the findings of Lai, Griffin & Babin (2009), which revealed that service quality affect customer patronage. The findings of Reichheld and Sasser (2010), also revealed that that service quality significantly affect customer patronage.

The findings on table 3 above shows that training, qualification, attitude, reward and compensation and internal conflict are the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations. The finding is consistent to the findings of Akbaba (2016), which revealed items similar to the above items as the factors affecting service quality in hospitality industry.

Hypothesis one revealed that green practices have a significant effect on customer patronage in hotel operations. The finding is consistent to the findings of Cascardo (2007), which revealed that Reichheld and Sasser (2010), also revealed that that service quality significantly affects customer patronage.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study examined the influence of service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operation in Asaba, Delta State. Service quality has ushered as one of the most critical success factors towards growth and survival of service firms. High service quality to customer offers a firm a competitive advantage in competitive markets. Perception of quality with respect to a service is difficult to frame due to intangible and heterogeneous attributes associated with the same. Perceived service quality has been observed as an attitude towards interpreting superiority of the service. The objectives of the study include; To identify the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations, examine the application of the identified service quality in fast food operations, determine the influence of identified service quality on guest repeat patronage in fast food operations and to identify the factors affecting service quality in fast food operations. The chapter two is grouped into four subheadings; conceptual framework, theoretical framework, empirical review and summary of literature review. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire from the selected customers of fast food operations in Asaba, Delta State. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and mean and regression analysis. The result revealed that service quality has a significant influence on quest repeat patronage.

The major findings of this study include:

- (i) Empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability are the dimensions of service quality in fast food operations.
- (ii) Empathy, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility and reliability influence quest repeat patronage.
- (iii) Training, qualification, attitude, reward and compensation and internal conflict are the

factors affecting service quality in fast food operations.

Recommendations

Based on the summary and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made

- (i) There are dimensions of service quality that enhances customer loyalty and patronage which includes reliability, responsiveness, empathy, attractiveness. Therefore, restaurant managers must consider these elements to attract more loyal customers.
- (ii) Customers' expectation has a significant effect on the customers' perceived service quality and customers' loyalty. Managers of the restaurants can affect their current and potential customers by adopting new strategies to keep them more satisfied and loyal to their restaurants.
- (iii) Employees of the hotels should give proper concentration to customers and should be willing to attend to them at every given time in order to gain their trust. That will guarantee repeat patronage.

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