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## Fast Foods Consumption and Well-Being Degeneration in Humans

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### **Abstract**

*Amidst the current global crisis, one line of business in Nigeria that continues to promise greater returns on investment is the Quick Service Restaurant. Despite the presence of economic, social and political dilemma in the country, the business continues to thrive.*

*Fast-food eating is a dietary pattern that used to be foreign but has gradually become a part of the lifestyle of people in Nigeria especially those in urban areas. Judging from the uncontrollable rate and manner at which fast food restaurants are opening almost every day in every nook and cranny of the country, the consumption of these foods may continue to increase. An examination of the factors involved in weight gain and obesity in the developed countries is crucial for prediction about the future of countries in early stages of frequently dramatic socio-economic changes like Nigeria. This paper therefore examined the increase in the trend of consumption of fast food, the factors that lead to the increase and the effect it could have on the people. While calling for health education intervention on educating the people on how to reduce the amount of fat in the foods they consumed so that the nation would not have to start battling with health problems relating to diet like it is happening in some advanced countries.*

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**Keywords:** Quick Service Restaurants, Nutrition, Health, Nigeria.

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### **Introduction**

The term “fast food” according to Ariyo, (2005); Raimi and Towobola, (2011) was first recognized by Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1951. It refers to food that can be easily prepared and served very quickly in an outlet to consumers. It can be served directly from oven to table (sit-in) or presented in form of take-out packages or containers (take-away). Common fast food menu found in outlets worldwide apart from drinks include pies, chips, fries, sandwiches, pizzas, noodles, chilis, salads, potatoes, rice, ice-cream, coffee, candies, hamburgers, fish, beef, chicken, turkey, hot dogs etc. Also, various sizes, types and kinds of outfits exist worldwide for the purpose of retailing fast foods. These range from carts, wagons (Jackie, 1999), stands, kiosks to restaurants, and modern day fast food retail outlets, better known as Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs). Fast food ventures are found and located everywhere with round the clock services where applied e.g. in convenient shops, drives, filling stations, schools, cashpoints etc. Therefore, the fast food industry can be divided into two: the formal sector and the informal sector. The formal fast food industry consists of the newly emerging organized and registered outlets of different sizes providing large scaled standardized eat-in and take-away services to consumers. The informal sector consists of the plethora of usually unregistered small operators and restaurants providing unstandardized fast but casual services to consumers. In this category are the traditional food vendors, cafeterias and casual dining restaurants, (Farrell, 2007).

Despite the challenges inherent in retailing in Nigeria, the quick-service restaurants (QSR) segment has been growing rapidly. QSR offers investors a quick turnaround for profits, (Food Institute Report, 2010; Ogunlade, 2010; Daily Sun, 2008). As of 2014 there were over 800 QSR outlets in Nigeria. They generated about N200bn (\$1.22bn) in revenue and employed more than 500,000 workers, according to AFFCON's president, Bose Ayeni. What precisely constitutes a QSR business varies by source, however. Market research by the US Department of Commerce. According to Minniti, and Lévesque, (2008), commercial Service found 290 QSR locations, for example, with three firms dominating the field: Mr Bigg's, Tantalizers and Food Concepts, the parent company of Chicken Republic. Mr Bigg's been first to market and is a leader in terms of locations, with more than 131 restaurants in 40 cities in both Nigeria and Ghana. Mr Bigg's is owned by United Africa Company of Nigeria (UAC), a diversified conglomerate founded in 1931. UAC was the first to bring the QSR concept to Nigeria in the 1960s, when it put coffee shops inside its Kingsway department stores, and then replaced them with broader offerings branded Kingsway Rendezvous in 1973, (Farrell, 2007). These and other early QSR chains were sometimes as simple as small stands serving snacks. In 1986 the first Mr. Bigg's opened up, ushering in a new era in which hot food became the focus. At present, there are over 150 brand names in the country. Also, the South western Nigeria alone now boast of about 500 outlets, of different sizes, which could be classified as standardized eateries, established by corporate individuals and organizations (Fakokunde, 2011). From these early beginnings a two track market has developed in which local chains are mostly aiming to provide cheap meals to Nigerians in the country's middle-income belt, while foreign chains service wealthier customers. At the lower end of the scale, the market is led by Mr. Bigg's. Sweet Sensations is known for being the first outlet to feature local cuisine on the menu, such as jollof rice and indigenous stews. In this segment Tantalizer's is the most likely to offer parking on site, and had about 30 outlets in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan and Port Harcourt in late 2013. Chicken Republic is expansion-minded, having opened 57 restaurants in Nigeria since its founding in 2004, according to its website. Of that total, 25 are in Lagos. Offerings at the chains vary widely. The most cost-conscious can spend as little as N100 (\$0.61) on a meat-filled pastry, whereas bigger spenders might drop N1000 (\$6.10) to N1500 (\$9.15) for a meal including chicken, rice, vegetables and a drink.

### **The Nigerian Fast Food Industry**

According to the Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria (AFFCON), the Nigerian fast food industry is healthy and currently worth about N190 billion with the potential to grow bigger (Food Institute Report, 2006). Also, the industry is considered as highly labour intensive. In Nigeria, it was identified as a leading overall employer of labour, looking at the food supply chain from farm to the table. The management and operations of QSRs require and attract various job opportunities and professionals, including service providers and suppliers. These ranges from farmers, caterers, horticulturists, interior decorators, technicians, food technologists to estate agents, architects, engineers, auditors, accountants etc.

There are other numerous indigenous QSRs holding sway in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt and other urban locations, namely Sweet Sensation, Chicken Lovers, Chicken Licking, Mama Cass, Captain Cook, Chicken Palace, Spices, etc. providing varieties of Africana and continental cuisines to teeming customers. The presence of international brands such as Nandos, Steers and St. Elmos is also felt in the industry. At present, there are about 100 brand names in the industry. Some big established outlets now offer franchise opportunities and arrangements for willing individual investors and entrepreneurs to own and operate fast food businesses with

their brand names. Through these arrangements and others, it is planned that more restaurants will be opened in due course to meet the ever-yearning desires of Nigerians for an ideal fast food industry in the country (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

Due to the socio-cultural background of the various ethnic settlements of the country, the Nigerian formal fast food industry operates amidst its more active informal counterpart, which is characterized by unregistered indigenous operators also providing restaurant services to the populace. But, the fast food industry is quick in changing the existing pattern by distinguishing itself into an organised structure providing healthy, modern and local menus, with class, status and taste attached to it (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

Mr. Bigg's is considered as the largest operator of fast food in Nigeria, with over 200 outlets, including its franchised locations, located in about 48 cities in all the states of the federation. Mr. Bigg's also operates outside Nigeria with outlets in Kumasi and Accra, both in Ghana. The popular Mr. Bigg's brand emerged in August 1986 as a result of intensive consumer research aimed at relaunching an ideal quick service restaurant in Nigeria. Recently, in response to increasing interest in local cuisines and ingredients, the Village Kitchen was introduced into the Mr. Bigg's brand (Alanana, 2003; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

Tantalizer, established by an indigenous entrepreneur, is another leading fast food chain in Nigeria. Its first outlet located at Festac Town, Lagos was first opened to customers on 1 May 1997. Tantalizers, now regarded as the fastest growing indigenous QSR in Nigeria, has about 50 outlets nationwide, with about 21 locations in Lagos metropolis alone. It has staff strength of about 2000 and offers wide varieties of patented fast food products to its numerous customers including both Africana and Continental dishes. Of recent, franchise arrangements have been made to establish more outlets across the country (Raimi and Towobola, 2011; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

Tastee Fried Chicken, commonly known as TFC, is also a popular QSR in Nigeria. TFC now has more than 10 retailing outlets in the country. Chicken Republic, a subsidiary of Food Concepts, S. A., is another top-5 QSR chain operating in Nigeria. Chicken Republic launched in 2005, with about 19 outlets in Nigeria and 1 outlet in South Africa, is considered as the fastest growing fast food franchise in West Africa. With over 6 million pieces of chicken sold in 2007 alone, Chicken Republic is also considered as the foremost chicken brand in Nigeria, (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

### **Factors Responsible for the Growth of Fast Foods in Nigeria.**

According to Olutayo and Akanle (2009), the number of fast food outlets in Nigeria is increasing at a geometric rate and expected to double in five years. This proliferation is not unconnected with the general upsurge in social and economic activities, (Brouwer, 2002). In 2006, the global fast food market grew by 4.8% and reached a value of 102.4 billion and a volume of 80.3 million transactions (Acs and Storey, 2004; Gwartney, Lawson and Holcombe, 1999; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). It was also reported on April, 19 2010 that sales increase of 3.0% from a year earlier is the largest in the sector since January 2009 (Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

The increasing growth and proliferation of fast food restaurants in Nigeria and globally can be attributed to the ever-increasing demand for its services for consumers to meet and cope with the global fast ways of livelihood (African Business, 2009). Daily increasing workloads and engagements occasioned by rigorous strife and struggles by individuals for survival and proficiency create less time for food preparation at home. Even, it is not unusual for women and

married couples to engage in official assignments and duties away from homes, therefore making the consumption of fast food to become a fact of life, (Parsa and Kwansa, 2001)

Mrs Olayinka Adedayo, the President of the Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria, (2009), summarized the several factors responsible for the consistent growth of the industry as the:

1. General increase in average disposal income of families
2. Decrease in the cost difference between eating out and cooking at home, and
3. Increasingly hectic lifestyles of people, which gives less time for home Cooking. (www.affcon.com).

### **Challenges of fast food operations in Nigeria**

The bottom line regarding QSRs worldwide is that they exert great influence in determining the physical and mental health status of the populace which they feed daily (Fakokunde, 2011). Therefore food safety concerns and hygiene issues relating to sanitation, contamination and diets have been raised in certain quarters. Whitney and Rolfes (2002) asserted that when a food manufacturer or restaurant chef makes an error, the result may be an epidemic food-borne illness. For instance, in the mid-1990s, when a fast food restaurant served undercooked burgers tainted with the infectious organism called, *Escherichia coli*, hundreds of patrons became ill, and at least three people died, (Jackie, 1999; Daily Champion, 2010; Iwarere and Fakokunde, 2011).

Several other studies and investigation have linked the increasing consumption of fast food to excessive body weight, especially in children, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc. (Sclosser, 2001; The Endocrine Society, 2008). As a result, fast food restaurants have been alleged several of promoting excessive calories intake beyond the daily 2000 calories needed by individuals. All these issues have stimulated increase interests in the promotion of the use and consumption of natural local food and cuisines containing fresh ingredients and unsaturated fats as against fast food choices. The growth and survival of the industry in the country can be said to be currently challenged by menaces such as:

1. Poor infrastructures and lack of basic public utilities.
2. Inadequate food processing facilities
3. High cost of funds
4. Multiple taxation
5. Informal practices among others.

Also, because of their attractive and accommodative nature, customers are usually tempted to overuse fast food facilities, turning them into meeting points and relaxation centres. In order to discourage this and as already implemented in the US, This Day (2009) reported that Nigerian government planned to impose tax and reduce indiscriminate consumption of fast food. The greatest challenge facing the country, according to AFFCON, is unhealthy competition posed by the plethora of the informal sector, which not only eats into the market share of the organized sector, but also threatens public health and the environment.

### **Statistics of Health Risks from Eating Fast Food**

It's no secret that fast food is typically high in fat, sodium and sugar, and low in fruits, vegetables and fiber. But it's convenient and often affordable. The downside, however, is more than just an unbalanced meal. Especially with long-term consumption, fast food can negatively affect you physically and emotionally. Regularly eating fast food can seriously damage one's

health. Coupled with low nutritional value, the high fat, calorie and sodium content of these foods can lead to a variety of health problems. With statistical associations to weight gain, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular conditions and all-cause mortality, regularly eating fast food can be a dangerous thing.

### ***Weight Gain and Obesity***

A typical fast food meal is extremely high in fat and calories. Weight gain occurs when an individual consume more calories than he burns in a day. Researchers found that eating more than twice per week at fast food restaurants is linked to significantly more weight gain over time than occasional visits, (The Endocrine Society, 2008).

### ***Type 2 Diabetes***

A 2004 study noted that regularly eating fast food doubles your chance of developing insulin resistance, which heightens risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Hypertension, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular disease are also linked to insulin resistance. The number of people worldwide living with diabetes has more than doubled since 1980, from 153 million then to nearly 350 million in 2011.

### ***Cardiovascular Conditions***

Higher densities of fast food restaurants are linked to a greater risk of cardiovascular health problems. In a 2005 study published in the "Canadian Journal of Public Health," researchers at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Ontario, Canada found that regions with high concentrations of fast food restaurants are 2.62 times more likely to have extremely high levels of hospitalization for coronary problems. A 2010 study by researchers at the University of South Australia supported this.

### ***All-Cause Mortality***

Fast food is associated with an increased risk of death even after ruling out deaths due to cardiovascular conditions. In its 2005 study, the Canadian research team noted that regions high in fast food restaurant density are 2.52 times more likely to be extremely high in all-cause mortality. Similarly, the researchers at the University of South Australia in 2010 noted that each 10 percent increase in the concentration of fast food restaurants in a region is linked to a 1.36 times greater risk of all-cause mortality.

### ***Depression and Addiction***

Researchers have linked fast food to depression. Compared to people who eat little to no fast food, people who regularly eat fast food are 51 percent more likely to develop depression, cites a March 2012 "Public Health Nutrition" article. The more fast food eaten, the greater the risk of depression becomes, the study concluded. A study published in the journal Public Health Nutrition showed that eating commercially baked goods (doughnuts, croissants, and, yes, even bran muffins) and fast food (pizza, hamburgers, and hot dogs) may be linked to depression. The study determined that people who eat fast food are 51 percent more likely to develop depression than those who eat little to no fast food. Additionally, some research suggests -- but has not been proven -- that fast food may be addictive, according to a September 2011 article in "Current Drug Abuse Reviews."

### ***Sodium***

Too much sodium causes your body to retain water, making you feel bloated and puffy. But that's the least of the damage overly salted foods can do. Sodium also can contribute to existing high blood pressure or enlarged heart muscle. If you have congestive heart failure, cirrhosis, or kidney disease, too much salt can contribute to a dangerous buildup of fluid. Excess sodium may also increase your risk for kidney stones, kidney disease, and stomach cancer. High cholesterol and high blood pressure are among the top risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

### ***Respiratory System***

Obesity is associated with an increase in respiratory problems. Even without diagnosed medical conditions, obesity may cause episodes of shortness of breath or wheezing with little exertion. Obesity also can play a role in the development of sleep apnea, a condition in which sleep is continually disrupted by shallow breathing and asthma, (The Endocrine Society, 2008). A recent study published in the journal *Thorax* suggests that children who eat fast food at least three times a week are at increased risk of asthma and rhinitis, which involves having a congested, drippy nose.

### ***Central Nervous System***

A junk food diet could also affect your brain's synapses and the molecules related to memory and learning, according to a study published in the journal *Nature*.

### ***Skin and Bones***

Chocolate and greasy foods are often blamed for acne, but they're not the real culprits. It's carbohydrates that are to blame. According to the Mayo Clinic, because foods that are high in carbohydrates increase blood sugar levels, they may also trigger acne.

The study in *Thorax* showed a higher risk of eczema (inflamed, irritated patches of skin) among children with a diet high in fast food.

When one consumes foods high in carbohydrates and sugar such as fast foods, bacteria residing in the mouth produce acids. These acids can destroy tooth enamel, a contributing factor in dental cavities. When the enamel of your tooth is lost, it can't be replaced. Poor oral health has also been linked to other health problems, (Holloway and Moore, 1983; Kleinberg, 2002).

Excess sodium may also increase the risk of developing osteoporosis (thin, fragile bones).

### **Conclusion**

Despite the various challenges faced by fast food operators, which in some cases, leads to eventual withdrawal from and closure of the business, the fast food business still remains one of the most promising ventures, entrepreneurs should not overlook. The emerging opportunities and potential patronages awaiting courageous and bold investors in the industry should not be further delayed and wasted, but adequately matched and harnessed with the possession of adequate skills and knowledge which this paper has succeeded in bringing to the fore.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is strongly recommended to Government that a special Ministry of Quick Service Restaurant should be urgently established and headed by a professional in that field. The Ministry should comprise Nutritionists, Medical practitioners, Microbiologist,

Biochemists and other relevant bodies. This would stem down the perils of fast food consumption.

2. Proper by-laws and monitoring of the informal sectors, that is, the kiosk, bukateria, mobile fast food vendors, cafeteria, restaurants, under -the -shed or under -the –tree should be put in place to check the health hazards posed by these channels.
3. Proper tax system should be organized to extend to all categories of the formal and informal sectors of the business outlets so as to broaden the revenue base of the nation.
4. QSRs should be given standardized nutritional requirements their products must contain or they run the risks of being sanctioned.
5. As much as possible, individuals and couples are encouraged to prepare their meals by themselves and eat at home, except where it is seriously unavoidable. Nigerians should develop a sense of discipline and self-control, the lack of which leads to an overwhelming dependence on fast foods that are rapidly deteriorating the health of many.

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