
Food Presentation and Customer Patronage in Fast Food Restaurants

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Abstract

This study is designed to explain how food presentation is related to customer patronage in a fast food restaurant.

The results indicate that perceived value mediates the positive relationship between service staffs and customers in other words, staff's ability to present food in an excellent and appealing manner increases perceived value in the customer's mind, which in turn results in a higher level of satisfaction and hence patronage. This study finds that firms with skilled internal staff, innovative service features and insightful knowledge on self-service technology can make a significant progress in the face of any adverse economic situation.

Introduction

Fast food restaurants are known to provide quick and valuable services to customers where tangible products like food and drink and other valuable services are provided for consumers in the form of food preparation and food service (McDaniel, Lamb & Junior, 2008). The fast food industry provides a rapid, convenient and relatively inexpensive service (Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014). Fast Food restaurants are differentiated by their unique characteristics that embrace prompt service, relatively low service interactions and relatively low price ranges as what these outlets offer to customers (Cao & Kim, 2015). The food service industry is diverse because it comprises a range of operations from the most distant kitchen table to the tiniest hot dog stand including those of the largest corporations specializing in food services, its equipment and distribution facilities. Restaurants are part of food service industry (Campos & Noberage, 2009; Salami & Ajobo, 2012; Kaur, 2013). The food service industry represents all establishments where food is regularly served (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2012)

Going by the cut-throat competition constantly experienced in the restaurant business, it has been observed that, firms with skilled internal staff, innovative service features and insightful knowledge on self-service technology can make a significant progress in the face of any adverse economic situation

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine relationship extent between Food Presentation and customer patronage:

- i.** To determine the extent of the relationship between food presentation and customer Retention
- ii.** To determine the extent of the relationship between food presentation and customer Commitment.

Research Questions

The following form our research questions:

- i.** To what extent does food presentation relate with customer Retention?
- ii.** To what extent does food presentation relate with customer Commitment?

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses are stated below:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between food presentation and customer retention.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between food presentation and customer commitment.

Conceptual Framework of Food Presentation and Customer Patronage

The conceptual framework for this study as depicted in figure 1 below, shows the various study variables. The study considered Food Presentation as an attribute to understanding food quality in fast food restaurants, Customer Patronage on the other hand, will be measured using customer retention and customer commitment.

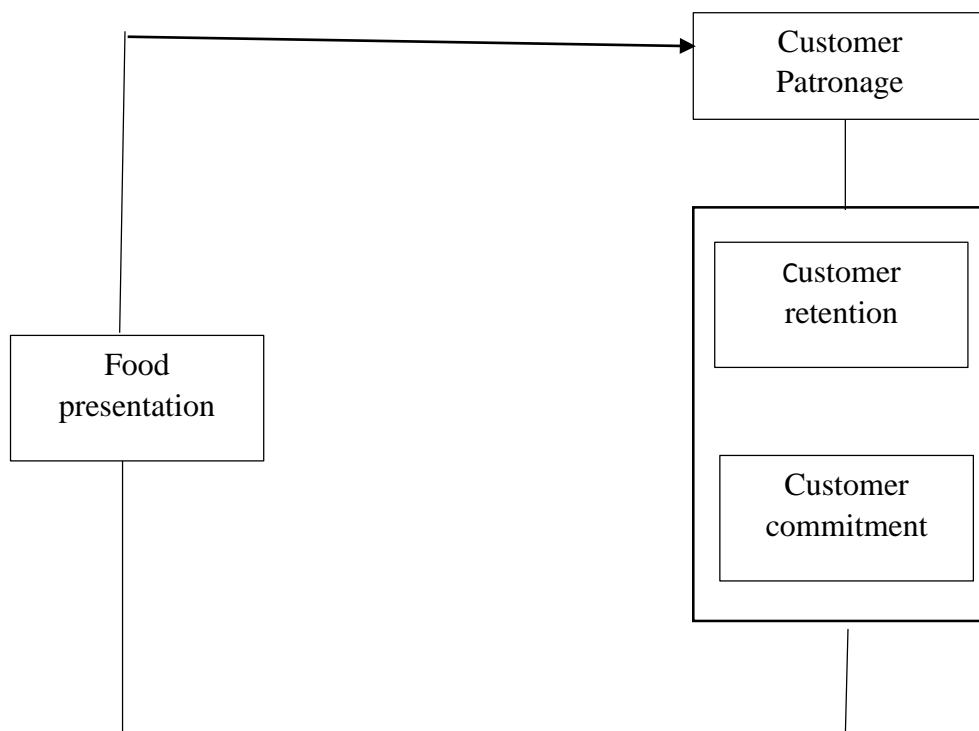


Fig 1.1 Conceptual framework for food presentation and customer patronage.

Review of Literature

Attribution theory: Attribution theory is a social cognitive theory of motivation centered upon the belief that retrospective causal attributions have bearing on present and future motivation and achievement (Weiner, 1972). Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, and Reed (1971) explains that majority of customers in the restaurant sector see service as a bundle of attributes and characteristics which customers assign different levels of importance to depending on the need. Customers' judgment before a restaurant is visited is dependent on the value of the offering (attributes and importance). Attribution theory also helps customers to evaluate a purchase experience whether it is satisfactory or not using the key quality attributes.

Attribution theory seeks to explain how an individual's perceived reasons for past success and failure contribute to their current and future motivation and success (Weiner, 1972). The extent to which a person tends to use the same combination of these causes over time is known as attributional style (Metalsky & Abramson, 1981).

Food Presentation: Food presentation is the process that the diners have offered the selected food in a fashion that is visually appealing. The food presentation has significantly impacted on the way in which customers consume their foods. In addition, the different colour, components, texture, shape and arrangements of foods must work together pleasantly and appropriately in order to form pleasing combination on plate (Zampollo, Kniffin, Wansink, & Shimsizu, 2011).

According to Kivela et al. (1999), food presentation is essential food attribute that modelling customer dining satisfaction. In fact, when the food is well presented, this may make the customers having a good feelings and moods to consume the foods in the particular fast food restaurant they visit. Consequently, this will help to create the good relationship and emotional attachment between customers and the fast food server.

According to Namkung et al. (2007), food presentation is a factor that constitutes food quality and impacts the appetite of the customer and their perception of food quality. Presentation is associated with how the food is being prepared and presented to the customers. It is a part of tangible cue and by successfully presenting a good-looking and well-decorated food can stimulate the customer perception of quality (Shaharudin et al., 2011). They also mentioned that food presentation actually is about how the consumer perceived the value of the product physically or internally (ingredients). Physically, the product may be perceived as good quality if it is presented with attractive packaging or informative labelling about the product. Internally, food may be associated with quality if the ingredients are in a complete mixture of necessary raw materials. Food is essential to sustain life and it is an important business component in the hospitality industry (Kandampully, 2007).

Customer Patronage Conceptualized

A customer (sometimes known as a client, buyer, or purchaser) is the recipient of a good, product or idea, obtained from a seller, vendor or supplier for a monetary or other valuable consideration (Reizenstein, 2004). A customer according to Alm (2000) is the most important visitor on business premises; he is not dependent on business but the business is dependent on him. He is not an interruption in business work rather He is the purpose of it. The customer is not an outsider in business but he is part of it. Business men are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing them a favor by giving them an opportunity to do so. According to the New Webster Dictionary (1994), Patronage can be said to mean, the material helps and encouragement given by a patron, in this instance the patron is seen to be a customer in an exchange transaction. It could also mean the act of being a regular customer to a shop.

In a highly competitive industry, satisfying the customers should be the primary focus of firms that wish to sustain patronage (Johns & Tyas, 1996; Kivela, et al., 1999; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Customer patronage is the approval or support provided by customers with respect to a particular brand. Patronage delivers the foundation for an established and growing market share. Kotler (2007) advocates that consumers have unpredictable degree of patronage to particular services, stores and other entities. Patronage arises when an individual displays conscious effort to choose a solution towards his or her need(s) through the process of analyzing situations which would be rewarding and relatively satisfying amidst some challenges faced in the course of fulfilling his/her own desires (Adiele & Grend, 2016). This explains why individuals can exhibit unconditional attachment and affection towards objects or persons (Adiele & Etuk, 2017). Oliver (1999) suggested that patronage is a continuum, starting from some cognitive beliefs followed by affective cognitive loyalty, and finally actual purchase behaviors.

Gaining customer patronage is an important objective of strategic marketing and relationship marketing initiatives (Kumar et al., 1999). Customers are more inclined to patronizing a business that goes the extra mile in marketing itself and special treatments leave a positive impact on customers and keeps them returning to the business (Ademola, 2013). Customers go through a process before buying an item. Understanding consumer behavior and the processes they go through in making a purchase decision is vital for building customer patronage.

Customer Retention

Organizations should be highly motivated to make certain its customers are satisfied. If they are not, the brand once more becomes vulnerable (Mercer, 1998). Customers are retained when they are satisfied. Customer satisfaction is the customer's overall feeling of contentment with a customer's interaction with the organization. Customer satisfaction in services has been defined as the degree to which service performance meets or exceeds the customer's expectations (Kumar, 2012; Lombard, 2009; Santouridis & Trivellas, 2010). Hui and Zheng (2010) defined satisfaction as an evaluative judgment of a specific transaction resulting from perceived quality. Danesh, Nasab and Ling (2012) defined customer retention as the future propensity of a customer to stay with the service provider. According to them, customer satisfaction is not the only variable that influences the retention of customers. Ramakrishnan, (2006) defined customer retention as the marketing goal of preventing a customer from switching to another competitor. Edward and Sahadev (2011, p. 33) stated that "customer retention indicates customer's intention to repurchase a service from the service provider". They used customer retention as a measure of the customer's intention to stay loyal to the service provider. For them, service quality and customer satisfaction are important antecedents of customer retention.

Generally, repeat customers are more profitable than new customer's acquisition. To ensure customers will revisit the restaurant, retaining customer would be the most important strategy to be used by restaurant because the cost of attracting a new customer is always greater than the cost of retaining existing customer (Fornell, 1992). Evidence from study of Chaudhry (2007) has proven that repeat customers generate over twice as much gross income as new customers. However, to gain a new customer will cost six to seven times more than to keep existing customers (Conklin, 2006).

Customer retention rate depends on five attributes within a restaurant which includes; service quality, food quality, ambience quality, first and last impression, and comfort level of the restaurant (Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece, 1999). It is important for the restaurateur to identify factors that will form positive attitude among customers and influence their behavioural intention. However, factors that influence customer satisfaction may not necessarily influence revisit intention. For example, Namkung and Jang (2008) explain temperature of food had a strong relationship with customer satisfaction, but no significant effect on revisit restaurant intention

Customer Commitment

Commitment has widely been acknowledged to be an integral part of any long-term business relationship (Stephens, 2000). In most cases, it is described as a lasting intention to build and maintain a long-term relationship (Orisingher, Valentini & Angelis, 2010). Tronvoll (2012), believed commitment entails three different dimensions: Affective commitment describes a positive attitude towards the future existence of the relationship; Instrumental commitment, shown whenever some form of investment like time, in the relationship is made. Finally, the temporal dimension of commitment indicates that the relationship exists over time.

Commitment Studies of exchange relationships among companies have concluded that commitment is an important concept, referring to the degree to which close and persistent relationships with other parties are established and maintained (Morrisson & Huppertz, 2010). Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar (1998) described commitment as a guarantee to maintain a relationship and the intent to sacrifice short-term benefits for long-term interests. Commitment is a persistent attitude that reflects the positive values of a relationship. Thus, commitment does not change frequently, as people would not make commitments to valueless relationships. As defined by Orisingher, et al (2010), commitment is the persistent desire to maintain a valuable relationship. Commitment, which can be viewed as the highest level of relational bonding, constitutes an indispensable part of a successful relationship. Therefore, the customer's commitment to its service provider can adequately reflect relationship quality of the two parties.

Customer commitment is a deeply held loyalty to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive purchasing of the same brand, despite situational influences and marketing efforts (Oliver, 1999). Gremler & Brown (1996) define it as "the degree to which a customer exhibits repeat purchasing behavior from a service provider, possesses a positive attitudinal disposition towards the provider and considers using this provider when a need for this service arises. Customer Commitment is thus viewed as the customer's demonstration of faithful adherence to an organization despite its occasional error or indifferent services.

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Methodology

The research made use of the descriptive research design, this method was adopted because it would aid in the establishment of the concept food presentation and customer patronage in the fast food restaurants. Also, the multiple regression would be used to test the hypotheses that were formulated in the study. The linear regression would aid in the establishment of the underlining concept between food presentation and customer patronage.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Linear regression analysis for the relationship between food presentation and customer retention

Variable	B	SEB	β	t	sig
FP	1229	.109	.851	8.930	.000
CRT	1421	.417	.851	19.710	.000

Source: Authors computation using SPSS version 22

Table 1 showed the result of the linear regression analysis between the criterion variable customer retention and the predictor variable food presentation. The regression result in table 1 above shows that food presentation (FP) has a positive and significant impact or influence on the customer retention (CRT) of restaurants. The beta (β) weight of .851 is an indication that about 85.1 percent of the effect of customer retention is caused by food presentation. Meanwhile, food presentation (FP) has a significant influence on customer retention. It shows that a 1% increase in FP would lead to approximately 85.1 % increase in customer retention. This impact is seen to be statistically significant at the 5% level of significance, judging from the F- value of 1229 which is >19.7107 . Therefore, Hypothesis one (H_{01}) of this study is rejected and it's alternate (H_{A1}) is accepted at the 5% level of significance. This means that there is a significant relationship between food presentation (FP) and customer retention (CRT) in restaurants.

Table 2: Linear regression analysis for the relationship between food presentation and customer commitment

Variable	B	SEB	β	t	sig
FP	.778	.096	.961	9.951	.000
CC	1421	.417	.070	19.710	.000

Source: Authors computation using SPSS version 22

Table 2 showed the result of the linear regression analysis between the criterion variable customer commitment and the predictor variable food presentation. The regression result in table 2 above shows that food presentation (FP) has a significant impact or influence on the customer commitment (CC) of restaurants. The beta (β) weight of .961 is an indication that about 96.1 percent of the effect of customer commitment is caused by food presentation. Also, food presentation (FP) has a positive and significant influence on customer commitment. It shows that a 1% increase in FP would lead to approximately 96.1% increase in customer commitment. This impact is seen to be statistically significant at the 5% level of significance, judging from the F- value of 1229 which is >19.7107 . Therefore, Hypothesis two (H_{02}) of this study is rejected and it's alternate (H_{A2}) is accepted at the 5% level of significance. This means that there is a significant relationship between food presentation (FP) and customer commitment (CC) of fast food Restaurant.

Results and Discussion

Food Presentation and Customer Retention

From table 1 the associated p - value for the corresponding test to food presentation and customer retention is less than 0.05, hence we strongly reject the null hypothesis, implying that there exist a significantly strong and positive relationship between food presentation and customer retention. This position is consistent with the position of Michel et al., (2015) they argued that food presentation is one major art that any customer-oriented and future-driven restaurant must be able to adequately master and implement to be able to appeal to customers' senses. This is because they believe that the presentation of a dish is not a secondary factor, even the orientation of a plate for example can affect customers' liking and willingness to pay. Their position was further correlated by Velasco et al. (2016) who argued that there is therefore the need for organization to find a way to stylishly and smartly present their food. This study agrees total with this assertion. Again this study finds support for this position from the work

of Namkung and Jang (2008) they identify food presentation (appearance) and taste as the most influential food quality factors, for customer retention.

From table 2 the associated p - value for the corresponding test to food presentation and customer commitment is less than 0.05, hence we strongly reject the second hypothesis, implying that there exist a significantly strong and positive relationship between food presentation and customer commitment. This position is consistent with the position Michel et al. (2014) who studied the impact of an artistic presentation in which sixty participants were recruited and were exposed to different presentation formats. The result revealed that majority of the participants chose the presentation that was neatly arranged and the customers were found to be satisfied and committed to the firms. Again this study find support from the work of Delwiche, (2012) who stated that presenting a good food can affect the customer's perception during dining which may include but not restricted to election of tables clothe, plate ware and table setting. However, Customers are rational and objective beings that consider various food quality attributes including food presentation before initiating a purchase decision. Meeting and exceeding these key food quality attributes determine the level of customer commitment. Again this study finds support from the thought of Velasco et al. (2016) who stated that food aesthetics plays a decisive role for eaters and may positively or negatively influence their commitment to the restaurant. Customer Commitment is thus viewed as the customer's demonstration of faithful adherence to an organization despite its occasional error or indifferent services.

Conclusion: The restaurant service sector appears to pay more attention on the measures of customer patronage. This by implication translates more to being profit oriented than customer oriented. This explains the reason behind constant complaints regarding cross-contamination, outbreaks of diseases and overall poor food hygiene. This study succeeded in providing strong evidences of the association between food presentation and all the measures of customer patronage. This reveals that the rate of patronage experienced by restaurant firms is highly dependent on the skill and ability of service staff to present foods in a manner that creates memorable customer experience. Customers are more inclined to patronizing a business that goes the extra mile in marketing itself and special treatments leave a positive impact on customers and keeps them returning to the business. To remain competitively positioned amidst varieties and better informed, customer service presentation in the restaurant industry must anticipate changes in the customer's taste and preferences and to render services that are of international standard. Efforts geared towards maintaining a high standard of service staff will amount to increased customer commitment, customer retention and customer referral in the restaurant industry in Rivers State.

Recommendations

1. Coping with stiff competition in the restaurant sector; emphasis should shift to ensuring customer satisfaction and creating customer delight than mere focus on customer patronage.
2. Service providers should train and retrain service staff and all representatives on globally accepted best practices regarding skills involved in preparing, arranging and decorating foods that can enhance food presentation.
3. To remain competitively positioned and relevant in the era of widespread technology advancement where customers have plethora of information at their disposal, restaurant owners and their management must be very proactive in discoveries, adopting and initiating new strategies that can improve food quality perception of customers.

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