

The Influence of Food Quality Attributes on Customers' Choice of Food Service Outlets in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract *With a plethora of studies that have confirmed that food quality is vital to customer patronage of food service outlet, attention is lacking on the aspect (attributes) of food quality and their influence on patronage. This quantitative study designed a research instrument through an exploration of relevant past studies and experts' opinion and used the same in data collection. After an empirical validation of the questionnaire through a pilot study which resulted in a reliability value of 0.869, data were collected from 685 non-randomly selected customers from seven purposely selected food service establishments in the study area. Findings show that all food quality attributes validated and examined were exceptionally influential to customers' patronage of food service outlet. Accordingly, the topmost food quality attributes and their mean scores are food tastes ($\bar{x} = 4.66$, food appearance ($\bar{x} = 4.56$, texture/mouth feel when eating ($\bar{x} = 4.53$, portion size/quantity ($\bar{x} = 4.51$ and the presence of certain ingredient(s) ($\bar{x} = 4.51$. of all customers' demographic characteristics examined, only marital status was significantly influential to their perception. This study recommends that food production staff should be trained to be able to deliver all the food quality attributes herein consistently to realise consistent customer choice of a food service outlet and that similar studies should be repeated in major cities across Nigeria so that tailor-made outcomes are available for an individual situation if required.*

Keywords: *Food Quality, Food Service Outlets, Food Quality Attributes, Customer Patronage, Ilorin*

INTRODUCTION

Due to convenience, regular availability and other benefits, the service rendered by food service outlets across Nigeria have become an option of many young adults and individuals who cannot indulge in preparing home-cooked meals due to the hectic lifestyle (Carew, 2010). In the same vein, industry players have gone beyond serving quick foods like snacks to venturing into African delicacies. This strategy of offering more than snacks has expanded the customer base of the food service industry over the past few years. There is an increase in the acceptance and patronage of food service outlets in Nigeria. However, customers are becoming choosy in the aesthetics, product and service received (Mustapha, Fakokunde & Awolusi, 2014). According to Liu and Jang (2009), the perceived benefits enjoined are the primary reasons why a customer prefers patronising a food service outlet over another. The comparative importance

that customers attach to individual benefits can differ significantly and these can be used as effective indicators in segmenting the markets. Markets consist of various buyers, and buyers differ in one or more respects. They may differ in their wants, resources, geographical locations, buying attitudes, lifestyles, and buying practices. Intuitively, the choice of customers visiting a restaurant hinges on identifiable factors peculiar to an environment which need to be ascertained. Most of the studies on customers' selection of food service outlets are based on the quality of service, staff attributes, availability and quality of amenities at the service environment and most importantly the food quality (Mattila & Whitz, 2001; Qin & Prybutok, 2008). However, all over the world, the components attached to quality are broad and this deserves research attention.

The food service industry is diverse; it comprises a range of food service operations including those of the largest

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corporations specialising in food services, its equipment and distribution facilities. According to Cousins et al. (2014), the food service industry represents the entire establishments where food is frequently served. Consequently, this makes the likes of a quick and full-service restaurant, eatery, fast food, freestanding restaurants and those attached to hotels and similar hospitality outlet part of the food service industry.

Despite security challenges and fluctuating condition of economic, social and political impasse, the food service business in Nigeria continues to promising as it keeps yielding greater returns on investment for stakeholders. The increase in the number of food service outlets cropping up in major cities and townships in Nigeria is an attestation that the sector is gaining acceptance among customers (Salami & Ajobo, 2012). The expansion of the food service industry in Nigeria has been a major growth such as the creation of employment opportunity for the citizenry and revenue generation for governments amongst other dividends. According to the Oxford Business Group (2016), the food service industry in Nigeria independently generated about N200bn in revenue and employed 500,000 workers. This enviable feat is commendable and much can be gained from the food service industry that is still growing because it has the potential to do more. As more investors and operators keep venturing into the food service business, there is a need to understand customers' trend in terms of what influences their selection of an outlet to stay in business and to consolidate on the current success the industry has achieved amongst other things.

Statement of the Problem

Amidst stiff competition and jostle for proportionate market-share, food service outlets have continued to strive toward success. However, success can best be achieved when conscious efforts are made to increase customer satisfaction and patronage which is anchored on high-quality food and service. This study acknowledges numerous studies (Dube et al., 1994; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Qin & Prybutok, 2008; Dutta et al., 2014) that had investigated and found that 'food quality' can make or break a food service outlet and for good motive. Despite their acceptance, food quality has been often overlooked in restaurant service quality and satisfaction studies (Namkung & Jang, 2007). A large number of studies on food quality had consistently examined 'food quality' as a single component, leading to a lack of empirical knowledge associate to the paucity of academic studies on the actual food quality attributes for stakeholders. Being aware that food quality as a component matters to guest patronage; being deficient in the necessary knowledge of food quality attributes could be deemed inadequate for consistent customer satisfaction. Just as having sufficient knowledge of the nature of one's market is of primary importance to

success (Parsa, Self, Njite & King, 2005), again, lacking the knowledge of the vital aspect of food quality that influences customers' preference of food service outlets is, in this case, the opposite.

Furthermore, the intrinsic nature of service, especially its heterogeneity, intangibility, inseparability and the variance in customers' expectation on service quality as explained by Parasuraman et al. (1985) has restricted service providers' capacity to consistently deliver quality service that meets consumers' expectation. Also, Aktas et al. (2009) stated that the divergence between the offered service and customers' expected service will be different, consequently, their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. For this reason, service providers are enjoined to have as much knowledge of customers as required to ameliorate the difficult nature of having to consistently satisfy them with acceptable service quality. Otherwise, service providers will continue to experience tough times in satisfying customers without a thorough knowledge of their preference for patronage unless this issue is adequately researched and outcome provided.

Also, as the absence of studies on food quality attributes influential to customers' patronage is already established, it may not be out of place to suggest that food service operators' across the country and especially in the study area, had been, and are providing services to customers on the assumption that food quality is one entity. Whereas, knowing and recognising the key aspects of food quality attributes will make customers satisfaction a lot easy. There is a vacuum in stakeholders' knowledge of the crucial attributes of food quality influential to customers' patronage. For instance, customers may complain of poor service experience in situations where delicious food are served at the wrong temperature, mismatched food pairing, the inadequacy of food texture and a small portion for the price paid to mention a few. The scarcity of foreign studies and, the outright lack of study on attributes of food quality at home is an attestation to the need for this study. More so, given the disparity in customers' behaviour due to varying social, political and economic and cultural conditions (Raju, 1995), there is a need for a home-based study that could yield tailor-made outcomes which will be suitable for food service operators within the study area similar ones beyond.

Amongst other achievements, this study is the first that explicitly investigated most of the attributes connected with food quality. It is an improvement on present direction/approaches took by earlier studies and the development of research instruments to adequately cover popular attributes of food quality. Specifically, this study responds to a recommendation by Parasuraman et al. (1985) in 'conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research'. The authors suggested that future studies on customer satisfaction in the service industry should explore areas that earlier studies haven't exploit and should

flesh up research instruments accordingly. This current study is the right response as it explores the influence of untapped aspects of food quality on customers' patronage of food service outlets. Upon completion, this study will provide stakeholders with concise knowledge of the aspects of food quality that are influential to customer patronage. Consequently, overservicing and underservicing of customers as being practiced due to the lack of knowledge of what really matters could be avoided.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and appraise the key aspects of food quality that are influential to customers' preference for food service outlets with the following objectives (i) to compile socio-demographic characteristics profiling of customers patronising the selected restaurants (ii) to rank the aspects of food quality influential to customers' choice food service outlets in the study area, and (iii) to determine if customers' socio-demographic characteristics affect their perception of food quality attributes influential to their choice of food service outlets. This is a valuable study for restaurateurs and stakeholders in the food service business, especially in the study area because it would supply us the knowledge of prevailing attributes of food quality that are influential to customers' patronage.

FOOD QUALITY AND ATTRIBUTES

A lot of empirical studies had attested to the great influence that food quality has on customers' patronage intentions of food-service outlets. Findings from most of these studies show that the success of a food service outlet depends on its ability to satisfy customers through the quality dining experience. Food quality is a fundamental factor in determining customers' satisfaction in restaurants (Namkung & Jang, 2007). Likewise, the overall food quality significantly affects customers' satisfaction and behavioural intentions and there is a relationship between food quality and customer behavioural intentions mediated by satisfaction (Kumar, Kumar & Bhatnagar, 2017). Furthermore, food quality has consistently been discussed as one of the leading reason that customers consider when selecting food service outlets/restaurants (Sulet & Hensley, 2004). Food quality is an essential element that food service outlets must offer in order to carry out their customers' desire (Peri, 2006). Peri's statement alluded to the fact that food quality is primary among service offering desire by customers in food service establishments. Walter et al. (2010); Jang and Namkung (2009) concur as authors stated that food is the core product and the most essential determinant of customer satisfaction in the restaurant business. Furthermore, food quality is the key determinant of customer loyalty (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001)

while Grunert (2005) stated that food quality correlates with customers' food preference and demand.

On the influence of food quality on customer buying behaviour, Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012) stated that customers perceived values are indicated by the quality of food and that these perceived values depend on food performance. When the quality of food represents the value for money paid, customers feel satisfied and are most likely going to be partaking in repeat purchases. The definition of quality may be differently perceived by customers, thus, it is not likely to satisfy customer perception of quality because customers' views are inconsistent and varied from various perspectives (Shaharudin et al., 2011).

On the constituents of food quality or the scope of food quality, Namkung and Jang (2007) examined some elements of food quality and found that food presentation influences customers' appetite and perception of food quality. Ryu et al. (2011) stated that food quality is a measure of customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry. Authors adopted five dimensions of food quality and this include food freshness, food deliciousness, food nutrition, menu varieties and enticing food smell along with other service elements to investigate restaurant image and customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In another study, Chirawan (2008) opined that food quality includes uniqueness in tastes and ingredients, menu variety, appearance and presentation, healthy food options and familiar food. In addition, food quality is the key determinant of customer loyalty in casual-dining restaurants (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001) stated. In support, Grunert (2005) stated that food quality is related to consumers' food choice and demand. Namkung and Jang (2007) linked food quality to the cost of food, tastiness, food portion, the healthiness of food and menu choice. An empirical study on customers' perspective by Susskind and Chan (2000) stated that food quality is the key determinant in customers' restaurant selection. While making a distinction between service quality and food quality, Cronin, Brady and Hult (2000) stated that the former relates to the employee's performance, however, technical service quality is associated with food quality. Both the service quality and food quality have been identified as two dimensions of quality perception that have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

As a term, food quality could mean different thing from person to person and the same person in different situations. In food preservation, processing and technology, food quality has been used to express chemical composition, microbiological and toxicological contaminants, shelf-life, packaging, and labelling of food (Petrescu et al., 2019). However, referencing the hospitality industry, food quality entails the entire activities and changes that occurred to food during cooking/preparation to service/presentation of food to the end-users (consumers). Underlining changes that happen during and the outcome of cooking/preparation to service/

presentation of food; these include a change in texture, taste, appearance, temperature and presentation amongst others.

Furthermore, food quality could mean different things between two areas of disciplines as earlier mentioned, also, the diversity of human socio-demographic characteristics may significantly sway food service operators' perception of food quality and affect their interpretation if not clearly itemised and explicitly explained. In light of this, just as it important for the operators, customers' perception of food quality attributes is also essential to understand how customers' patronage and purchase decisions are made. While discussing food quality attributes within the restaurant setting, Nwokah and Nne (2018), opined that for a restaurant to be seen as offering advanced quality food, it must be offering reasonably high-quality meals with fresh ingredients, and consistent delivery of food at the right temperature. Meals must have consistent tastes, consistent portions, and be delivered at consistently satisfying way. Kramer and Twigg (1968); Lancaster (1971) and Molnar (1995) discussion on food quality attributes somewhat appear more of food science, production and manufacturing point of view. The authors described food quality as the compilation of physical properties, chemical composition, sensory attributes, microbiological and toxicological contaminants, shelf-life, packaging, and labelling of food, determining the product's performance and it influences customers' acceptance or rejection of the product. Sensory attributes entail the appearance, odour, flavour, taste, and texture of foods.

Baiardi et al. (2016) stated that food quality attributes are the chemical, microbial, shelf-life, toxicological and other non-physical attributes. It is worthy of note that the aforementioned food quality attributes by the authors are not within the scope of food consumption in an eatery and they cannot be verified by merely ingesting prepared food items as obtained in food service outlets. Therefore, the selected food quality attributes that can be ascertained by consumers whilst eating at a food service outlet or the purchase of takeaway meals is best considered. For this reason, definitions/descriptions of food quality attributes in this study are narrowed to changes occurring to food, from preparation to service, and do not require laboratory and chemical examination or analysis before customers can experience them. These food quality attributes include taste, aroma, texture, mouthfeel, appearance, presentation, temperature, presence of certain ingredients, portion size and a couple of attributes as may be further explored.

METHODOLOGY

This study is largely a quantitative study thus descriptive in its approach toward data analysis and presentation. However, it adopted the exploratory approach to collect

information on the actual attributes of food quality that are influential to customers' decision to patronise a particular restaurant in the study area. The paucity of academic studies on aspects of food quality influencing consumers' preference of restaurant necessitated the adoption of the exploratory approach to support a few related foreign studies in this regard. Consequently, purposive selection of restaurateurs', dinners and academics were embarked upon to gather information and the same were incorporated in the questionnaire. This aligns with Neuman (2011) that when there is a shortage/absence of information on a certain issue being researched, exploration of useful information from experts/stakeholders is adequate. Middleton (2019) concurs that experts can be contacted to improve the quality of a research instrument before it is administered. On the need for and importance of sourcing customer input in questionnaire development, Baiardi et al. (2016) are of the opinion that food quality is formed by the perceptions held by customers. This study draws on the statement that one important key to the understanding of the food quality evaluation is the discovery of the cues used by consumers in determining the constituents of food quality.

Since methodology has been described as a stage in the conduct of research that incorporates the techniques or procedures used to gather, analyse and interpret the data collected during a research process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), for this reason, after the description and the selection of the study area, discussion on methodology here, briefly centres on questionnaire development and validation, research population, sample, sample technique, data collection and analysis right.

Study Area

The selected study area comprises of popular places in Ilorin, Kwara State capital. Established in 1967 and located within the North Central geopolitical zone. Kwara State comprises sixteen local governments, of these; Ilorin has three local governments which are Ilorin West, Ilorin South and Ilorin East. According to Babatunde et al. (2014), by 2020, Ilorin will have an estimated population of 1, 272, 908 inhabitants. As the state capital, Ilorin houses the most number of institutions Kwara State and this makes the majority of travellers to Kwara State to stop by or have one thing or the other to do in Ilorin. For instance, Ilorin houses Kwara State secretariat, Kwara State Internal Revenue Service (KWIRS), Ministry of Finance, Kwara State Court of Appeal, one of the leading pharmaceutical company in the country, offices of numerous corporate businesses and enterprises, state headquarters of banks and residential buildings. As observed, the three Ilorin local governments are the most resided and most visited by the three million Kwara State residents and thousands of interstate travellers respectively.

Similarly, Ilorin boasts of many hotels for visitors lodging and entertainment joints, food service outlets, the University of Ilorin and couple of leading tertiary institution in Nigeria. All the aforementioned make Ilorin one of the fastest-growing state capitals that are receiving large visitor arrivals in Nigeria. However, of the three Ilorin local government areas, Ilorin South was purposefully favoured for this study because it houses the largest percentage and the best among food service outlets, hotels, recreation centres and cinemas, shopping malls and numerous reasons for travellers' mobility in Kwara State. The aforementioned reasons together with the convenience of data collection make Ilorin South local government the selected area for this study.

There is a great opportunity for food service businesses situating in the study area by conducting this study. First, there is a potential market given the rise in the number of people residing in and travelling to Ilorin South as potential customers for food service outlets therein. Ilorin currently accounts for over thirty per cent (over a million) of the entire population of Kwara State (City population, 2017). According to Babatunde et al. (2014), Kwara State will boast of an estimated 3, 518, 771 residents while Ilorin will account for a projected 1, 272, 908 people which is roughly 30% of the entire Kwara State population City Population (2017) stated. In addition, as the population continues to increase day-after-day, this is a boom for food service ventures and related tourism and hospitality businesses. On the availability of potential patronage for food service outlets, the three Ilorin local governments are the most resided and most visited by millions of Kwara State residents, thousands of interstate travellers and foreign visitors as well as over one hundred thousand students, temporarily residing and studying at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State polytechnic, Al-Hikmah University, Kwara State, College of Education and College of Health Sciences, Ilorin. On selection of the study area, the following places Fate, Tanke, University road, Pipeline road, Government Reserved Area of Ilorin, Unity and Ibrahim Taiwo roads are purposely selected because of the presence of a cluster of food service businesses including classy restaurants. The study area is a true reflection of an ideal cosmopolitan settlement such as the presence of abundant students' hostels, residential apartments, elegant shopping malls, cinemas and leisure centres that are equipped for modern enjoyment. The study area comprises of eye-catching social infrastructure and development that is fit for an accurate representation of consumers' activities in a state capital.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was divided into two sections. Section A comprises demographic information of the respondents and this is important for market segmentation

and to find out whether respondents' perceptions differ by demographic characteristics. On section B, relevant attributes relating to food quality were extracted from Abdullah et al. (2018); Nwokah and Adiele (2018) and a few other related studies. A total of sixteen (16) attributes of food quality were initially proposed and presented to purposely selected experts (seven customers, three restaurateurs, and three academics) for validation. Accordingly, fourteen (14) attributes were validated by experts who also suggested that two attributes: (i) nourishing/wholesomeness of food and (ii) method(s) of cooking. Experts were unanimous in their suggestion that food nourishment/wholesomeness and methods of cooking are neither identifiable nor observable physically by customers should be discarded from the list of the final list of food quality attributes to be presented to customers in the real data collection.

Apart from the demographic section of the questionnaire, the entire questions that sought respondents' views on food quality with five-point Likert-scale queries. The Likert-scale type of question was used because of its effectiveness in gathering respondent perceptions on service quality related matters and measurement of satisfaction levels in tourism-related studies as stated Hassan and Shahnewaz (2014).

Population, Sample Size and Sample Technique

There are two perspectives to discussing the population sizes in this study; on the one hand, non-random sampling -purposive technique was used to pick seven out of twenty-three food service outlets in the study area. The selected food outlets were picked based on common service-attributes/amenities, the similarity of service types and other physical attributes. On the other hand, customers' population which comprise of potential consumers that are patronising the selected restaurants in the study area was unknown/infinite. Therefore, it cannot be ascertained. Given that the infinite status of customers' population at the selected food service outlets, Freneund and William's suggestions on how to determine the sample size of an infinite population as highlighted by Bello and Omoh (2018) was adopted for this study as follows:

$$n = \frac{(Z_{a/2})^2 PQ}{e^2}$$

Where

P = Probability for positive response.

Q = Probability for a negative response.

e = Tolerable error (0.05)

$Z_{a/2} = 1.96$ from the critical table Z of 0.05 under an infinity

$\alpha = 0.05$, the significant level

n = Sample size

Applying this formula to the present study, the sample size (n) of 323 was obtained as follows.

$$n = \frac{(Z_{\alpha/2})^2 PQ}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.7)(0.3)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(3.8416)(0.7)(0.3)}{(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{0.806746}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 322.69 \approx 323.$$

In view of the above mathematical expression, a minimum of 323 respondents is methodically adequate as the sample size for a study that is having an infinite population size. However, for two reasons this study sampled 685 dinners instead of the 323. First, there was an opportunity to attract respondents due to the immense support received from managers and owners who were very hospitable and promoted an enabling environment that makes data collection possible. Second, the respondents were very cooperative and displayed enthusiasm to take the survey during data collection exercise. Accordingly, the researchers together with four research assistants were able to administer 100 copies of questionnaires at six of the seven food service

outlets. However, at the seventh outlet, 85 questionnaires were administered out of 100 despite persuasion, patience and tolerance by the research team to get more participation. Consequently, the total number of questionnaires that were administered stood at 685.

Pilot Study

During the build-up to the real fieldwork, 60 participants were selected non-randomly from two of the selected restaurants for the pilot study two weeks before the actual data collection exercise. Of this, 57 responses were received and analysis therein yielded a reliability value of 0.869. After the pilot study, data collection commenced between Friday, 26th to Sunday 28th of July 2019. Of the 685 questionnaires administered and collected, 654 were valid and the same were appropriate for data analysis. The remaining 31 questionnaires were lost to inaccurate questionnaire completion and some major errors that rendered them void. Data were analysed and results are presented next.

RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Data were statistically analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data in section A were analysed using frequency and percentage, while data in section B were analysed using frequency and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) at 0.05 level of significance. Tables 1 – 3 depict data that emanated from the empirical exercise (fieldwork).

Objective One: Socio-demographic characteristics profiling of customers patronising the selected restaurants.

Table 1: Percentage Distributions of Dinners Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Sr. No.	Variables	Description	Frequency	%	Sr. No.	Variables	Description	Frequency	Cumulative%
1	Age (in years)	Less than 18	114	17.4	5	Marital Status	Single	432	66.1
		19-23	255	39.0			Engaged	96	14.7
		24-28	150	22.9			Married	111	17.0
		29-33	60	9.2			Living together	3	0.5
		34-38	30	4.6			Separated	12	1.8
		39-43	18	2.8			Total	654	100.0
		44-48	15	2.3			6	Frequency of patronage per week	0-1
		49 & above	12	1.8	2-3	300			45.9
		Total	654	100.0	4-5	105			16.1

Sr. No.	Variables	Description	Frequency	%	Sr. No.	Variables	Description	Frequency	Cumulative%		
				58.7			6-7	28	6.4		
				41.3			8-9	8	1.8		
				100.0			9 & above	18	2.8		
2	Gender	Male	384		7	Average weekly spending on food	Total	654	100.0		
		Female	270				Less than or = 500	78	11.9		
		Total	654				501- 1,000	165	25.2		
				1,001- 1,500			92	21.1			
				1,501- 2,000			84	12.8			
				2,001- 2,500			42	6.4			
				2,501- 3,000			42	6.4			
				3,001- 3,500			27	4.1			
				3,501- 4,000			18	4.1			
				4,001 & above			51	7.8			
				Total	654	100.0					
3	Religion	Christianity	408	62.4	8	Ethnic/tribe	Yoruba	504	77.1		
		Islam	237	36.2			Igbo	84	12.8		
		Others	9	1.4			Hausa	42	6.4		
		Total	654	100.0			Others	24	3.7		
				Total			654	100.0			
4	Employment	Self-employed	207	31.7							
		Unemployed	96	14.7							
		Employed	84	12.8							
		Retiree/pensioners	18	2.8							
		Students	246	37.6							
		Others	3	0.5							
		Total	654	100.0							

Source: Field survey (2019)

From Table 1, the age of the respondents varied, 114 (17.4%) were less than or equal to 18 years, 255 (39.0%) were between 19-23 years, 150 (22.9%) were between 24-28 years, 60 (9.2%) were between 29-33 years, 30 (4.6%) were between 34-38 years, 18 (2.8%) were between 39-43 years, 15 (2.3%) were between 44-48 years; while 12 (1.8%) of the respondents were 49 years and above. The majority 384 (58.7%) of respondents were male; while 270 (41.3%) were female. The respondents were affiliates to varying religions, majority 408 (62.4%) of them were practising Christianity, 237 (36.2%) were Islamic religion adherents; while 9 (1.4%) were from other forms of religious practices. On respondents' employment status, 207 (31.7%) of the respondents were self-employed, 96 (14.7%) were without a job, 84 (12.8%) were in employment, 18 (2.8%) were retired, 246 (37.6%) which forms the majority were students; while 3 (0.5%) was in other forms of employment status not categorically defined.

With respect to marital status, 432 (66.1%) of the respondents were singles, 96 (14.7%) were engaged, 111 (17.0%) were married, 3 (0.5%) were living together; while 12 (1.8%) were in a separated relationship. In terms of the number

of times respondents patronise their preferred food service outlet(s) weekly, 177 (27.1%) indicated between 0-1 time, 300 (45.9%) indicated between 2-3 times, 105 (16.1%) stated between 4-5 times, 42 (6.4%) have patronised between 6-7 times, 12 (1.8%) indicated that it was their 8-9 times of patronage; while 18 (2.8%) do patronise for 9 times and above. On the amount in Naira that respondents spent buying food in the outlet(s) averagely, 78 (11.9%) of the respondents indicated that they spent 500 Naira and below, 165 (25.2%) spent between 501-1,000, 138 (21.1%) spent between 1,001-1,500, 84 (12.8%) spent between 1,501-2,000, 42 (6.4%) spent between 2,001-2,500, also 42 (6.4%) spent between 2,501-3,000 on food, 27 (4.1%) spent between 3,001-3,500, also 27 (4.1%) of the respondents spent between 3,501-4,000; while 51 (7.8%) spent within 4,001 and above per week on food purchase. Finally, on respondents ethnic affiliation, 504 (77.1%) of the respondents were Yoruba and represent the majority, 84 (12.8%) were Igbo, 42 (6.4%) were Hausa; while 24 (3.7%) represent some other tribes including non-Nigerians.

Objective Two: Food quality attributes influential to customers' choice of food service outlets.

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of the Aspects of Food Quality Influential to Customers' Choice of Food Service Outlets

Validated Aspect of Food Quality As	Not at All Influential	Not Sure	Rarely Influential	Mildly Influential	Very Influential	Mean Value	Std. Dev.	Rank
	Percentage (%)							
Taste of food (how the food tastes when consumed)	1	1	5	16	77	4.66	.736	1
Appearance/the look of food	3	1	7	20	70	4.56	.808	2
Texture/mouth feel/crunchiness when eating (munch, chewing and swallowing)	1	1	8	21	69	4.53	.816	3
Portion size/quantity of food served (for eat-in and takeaway)	1	2	7	25	65	4.51	.792	4
The presence of certain ingredient(s) used in the preparation of food	1	1	9	24	65	4.51	.790	5
Freshness	2	2	10	28	58	4.43	.815	6
Aroma (enticing smell of the food)	1	1	10	30	58	4.43	.793	7
Temperature at which food is served (for instance, cold dishes being cold/chilled and hot dishes are served hot)	2	1	11	29	57	4.37	.833	8
Menu variety (availability of assorted menu and dishes)	1	3	12	31	53	4.32	.842	9
Service time/turnaround time (the pace at which orders are prepared and served)	1	3	14	32	50	4.28	.855	10
Texture/feel when food is touched/handled (hand feel)	2	2	16	35	45	4.22	.863	11
The method/style used in cooking/preparation of food	1	2	22	31	43	4.17	.876	12
Presentation/serving of food (in terms of service tools including chinaware, take-away pack, the technique to plate the food, decorate attractively to achieve appealing attention)	4	2	19	29	47	4.12	.966	13
The combination of food items in each meal/serving (for instance the choice/quality of food pairing including what is served along with specific food items)	2	3	21	29	35	4.03	.903	14

Source: field survey (2019)

Table 2 shows that all the fourteen attributes of food quality that was examined recorded mean scores that are above the average (benchmark) mean value of 3.00 for determining the main influential factors. However, the following attributes taste of food ($\bar{x} = 4.66$ & $\sigma = .736$), appearance ($\bar{x} = 4.56$ & $\sigma = .808$), texture/mouthfeel when eating ($\bar{x} = 4.53$ & $\sigma = .816$), portion size/quantity ($\bar{x} = 4.51$ & $\sigma = .792$) and the presence of certain ingredient(s) ($\bar{x} = 4.51$ & $\sigma = .790$) took precedence over others and were ranked between 1st and 5th respectively. Given that all these attributes came out with average mean value more than 3.00, it suffices to conclude that all the fourteen attributes are significant and stakeholders should keenly pay attention to them.

The finding in Table 2 agrees significantly with Petrescu et al. (2019); this empirical study on consumers' understanding of food quality in Belgium and Romania, the most often considered attributes that participants used for evaluating food quality are food freshness, tastes and appearance.

Although, the scope of Petrescu's study is on food production and technology, technology, not on food service outlets/restaurants customers, it tilted more to and yet, it reiterated the importance that consumers attach to these three qualities that also appear among the topmost six in this current study. Also, to an extent, the finding in this study agrees with Boushaba and Elatife (2020), food taste and quantity were among the top five factors influential to consumers' consumption of fast-food products in Morocco.

On the association between findings in this study and earlier studies that considered food quality as a unit, starting with Dube, Reneghan and Miller (1994), the authors found that food quality is the most important factor for repeat purchase intentions of customers at classy restaurants. Likewise Grunert (2005), the author revealed that food quality correlates to consumers' food choice and demand. Two separate studies conducted in Malaysia by Akbar and Alaudeen (2012) and Abdullah (2013), respectively, found that customers attach much priority to food quality in

their selection of full-service restaurant; and food quality contributed to the rate of repeat patronage of the restaurants by consumers respectively. Food quality was topmost in consumers' choice of a particular restaurant in Tabassum and Rahman (2012), likewise, food quality top the list of factors influencing consumers' repeat patronage intention (Sefian et al., 2013). Another empirical study by Alao et al. (2020) reported that food quality is significant to customers' patronage and repeat-patronage. One unique thing that distinguishes this current study from those cited in this section is the itemisation of fourteen food quality attributes that are influential to customers' patronage. With this, operators and consultant are now equipped with the aspects of food quality attributes that matter to customers' selection of food service outlets.

Objective Three: Determining if customers' socio-demographic characteristics affect their perception of food quality attributes influential to their choice of a particular food service outlet.

Hypothesis Testing

One null hypothesis was formulated and tested using a Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) at 0.05 level of significance. This was aimed at investigating if respondents' opinions differ by socio-demographic characteristics. In a number of customer-related studies in tourism and hospitality, respondents' demographic characteristics have been found to influence the perception of the issue been investigated. For instance, studies by Sriwongrat (2008) and Islam et al. (2018) revealed that consumers' socio-demographic characteristics were influential to their choice of a classy ethnic restaurant

in New Zealand and selection of restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In view of the possibility that socio-demographic characteristics may influence respondents' perceptions; this study hypothesised that respondents' socio-demographic characteristics will not significantly influence their perception of the aspect of food quality influential to their choice of food service outlets and tested the same as follows:

H₀₁: Respondents' perception of food quality attributes influential to their choice of food service outlets will not be significantly influenced by socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 3(a): Model Summary of the Degree of Correlation on Customers' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.151 ^a	.023	.010	14.066

a. Predictors: (Constant), Income, Tribe, Marital Status, Religion, Gender, Employment, Freq. of patronage, Age

Table 3(b): ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2989.050	8	373.631	1.888	.059 ^b
	Residual	127611.73	645	197.848		
	Total	130600.803	653			

a. Dependent Variable: Selection of restaurant

b. Predictors: (Constant), Income, Tribe, Marital Status, Religion, Gender, Employment, Freq. of patronage, Age

Table 3(c): Coefficients of the Contribution of Respondents' Demographic Profiles' to Their Perception of the Influence of Food Quality Attributes to the Choice of Food Service Outlets

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	81.134	1.618		50.152	.000
	Age	-.761	.454	-.083	-1.678	.094
	Gender	1.703	1.168	.059	1.458	.145
	Tribe	-.064	.736	-.003	-.087	.931
	Religion	-.650	1.081	-.024	-.601	.548
	Employment	-.592	.352	-.072	-1.681	.093
	Marital status	1.424	.645	.100	2.179	.030
	Freq. of patronage	.926	.556	.074	1.664	.097
	Income	.155	.269	.026	.576	.565

a. Dependent Variable: Selection of restaurant

The model summary Table 3(a) provides the R values of 0.151, which indicates a lower degree of correlation. The R² value indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent

variable (factors influencing preference for restaurants), is explained by the independent variable (demographic profiles of the respondents). In this case, 2.3% can be explained,

which is very small. The Table 3(b) is the ANOVA table, which presents how well the regression equation fits the data (that is, predicts the dependent variable). The table indicates that the regression model does not significantly predict the dependent variable ($F_{\{8, 645\}} = 1.888, p > 0.05$). Meaning that the regression model is not a good fit for the data. The coefficients Table 3(c) indicates that the respondents' demographic profiles did not contribute significantly to the model, $B = -.761, 1.703, -.064, -.650, -.592, .926$ and $.155$; $p > 0.05$ for age, gender, tribe, religion, employment, frequency of patronage and income respectively; except marital status (with $B = 1.426$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, no relationship exists between age, gender, tribe, religion, employment, frequency of patronage, income and choice of food service outlets; while a significant relationship was found between marital status and choice of food service outlets.

The finding above contradicts Sriwongrat (2008); the author found that customers' gender, age, ethnicity, educational status, occupation and income had a significant influence on the preference of a classy ethnic restaurant in New Zealand. It also contradicts Islam et al. (2018) reported that age, gender difference and income of the customers are influential to consumers' selection of restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Evidently, studies on the influence of customers' demographic variables on a particular situation could go either way. Mhlanga and Machingambi (2016) are of the opinion that customers with different demographic characteristics tend to have different restaurant expectations. The authors gave this opinion in view of contradictory outcomes of most of the studies on the influence of customers' demographic variables on restaurant expectations and other issues at hand. Although, previous studies on the influence of food quality on customers' choice of place to dine in many cases, did not itemise food quality attributes. Notwithstanding verifiable arguments from studies that discussed food quality as an entity that is fundamental to customers' satisfaction in restaurants (Namkung & Jang, 2007) and significantly affect customers behavioural intentions (Kumar et al., 2017), it suffices to say that whether in its compound states or when itemised, food quality is influential to customers' buying behaviours and consumers' socio-demographic characteristics would have a different effect on the situation being researched.

On consumers' marital status which had a significant influence on their perception of food quality attributes influential to the choice of food service outlets; this could be due to the changes that occur in marital life. For instance, men and women seem to want different products and service, and they are likely to have different ways of thinking about obtaining what they desire (Shaw, 2012). Therefore, two different people trying to be one may be responsible for the difference recorded in this study. Consequently, food service operators should be more concerned in finding out and adjusting to ways to satisfy married customers due to the difference in their views.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a step taking to investigate the aspects of food quality attributes that matter in customers' choice of eatery, this study was conceived to ascertain the aspects of food service influential to customers' patronage. It hypothesised that customers' socio-demographic characteristics will not significantly influence their submission on food quality attributes. This study achieved all it sets out to and results from the empirical data resulted in the under listed major conclusions that:

- All itemised food quality attributes that were validated by experts and examined empirically are very influential to customers; patronage.
- Customers' socio-demographic characteristics, to an extent, do not influence their perception of food quality attributes influential to patronage except for marital status. This means that operators should be more concerned in finding out and adjusting to ways to satisfy married customers due to the difference in their views.

In view of the conclusions above, this study hereby recommends that:

- Food service outlets' in the study area should acknowledge and consider consumers' view herein and continue to provide quality services in all areas food quality attributes found to be influential to customers' patronage.
- Continuous studies to update customers' view on the same issue periodically should be practised. This will provide up-to-date knowledge and information on prevailing factors that are in tune with changes in customers' demographic characteristics which may influence their future decision. Doing so will guarantee steady customer patronage, revenue generation and healthy opportunity to remain in business amongst other benefits.
- Food preparation and service personnel should be informed on the sensitivity of the outlined food quality attributes and their role in attracting customers inward. Subsequently, they should be trained to be able to deliver these food qualities sustainably in order to realise consistent customer patronage.
- This study should be repeated in major cities across Nigeria. Stakeholders, customers, in particular, should be involved in questionnaire design and validation to give room for the possible addition of food quality attributes as may be considered in other parts of the country. Realising this will boost literature on this important issue on food quality.

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