

FOOD SERVICE ATTRIBUTES AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE IN CAMPUS CAFETERIAS IN RIVERS STATE

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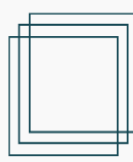
Abstract

One of the major marketing management challenges facing cafeterias today is matching customers' expectations and experiences with their product/service offerings. Yet, not much is understood about the interplay between food service characteristics, customer experience and patronage of campus cafeterias. Our study was, therefore, designed to empirically validate the effect of food service attributes on customer patronage of campus, with a focus on the university of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study involved 264 customers of the cafeterias most of whom were students, purposively selected to generate primary data for the study through the questionnaire method. Descriptive and inferential statistical analytical tools were adopted for data analysis. The findings showed that price of food and service setting/environment had significant effect on customer patronage, while quality of food did not have any significant effect on patronage in the context of campus fast-food restaurants operating on the university of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study concluded that price of food and service setting were important predictors of patronage of campus cafeterias in the context of university of Port Harcourt. The study recommended that price of food should be properly communicated and quality of food should be improved upon to drive patronage and that regular employee training programmes be implemented as part of the service marketing strategy to enhance quality service delivery.

Keywords: Food service attributes, customer patronage, cafeterias.

1. Introduction

Food is, unarguably, one of the physiological requirements upon which man depends to function effectively and efficiently every day. Consequently, hospitality industry development has facilitated the emergence of food service delivery systems to satisfy the needs of certain market segments (Owase, 2020).



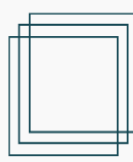
One of the important market segments targeted by many industrial and private commercial catering organizations are students and workers in tertiary institutions. Accordingly, food service facilities also known as cafeterias are being established around the campuses to meet the food needs of this fast-growing segment for profit-making.

A Successful catering business operation in an intellectually enlightened environment presupposes high standard food service delivery that matches or surpasses customers' expectations as failure to do so would be disastrous with attendant switching behavior. Thus, it has been argued that the quality of food service is one of the most relevant items perceived by customers. (Dall'oglio et al., 2015). This is because the hospitality service delivery elements (quality of physical environment, food quality, service personnel contracts, taste of food and price) have been reported to influence customer satisfaction, revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth (Nan & Sean 2017). Given the pervasiveness of campus cafeterias, it has been asserted that food service attributes have become areas around which customers can evaluate the offerings of the organizations in a competitive business environment to determine value addition in enriching the quality of campus life for all (Lin & Morrison (2012),

Regarding quality, research suggests that cafeterias were more pre-occupied in the past with food quality and taste (Owase, 2020), but the times have changed and are still changing. Today, competition and growing customer sophistication are forcing these organizations to pay equal attention to other important factors like serving, atmosphere, interior decorations, tangibles and location that combine to create total memorable experience beyond eating. Customers also value a cafeteria where they can relax, enjoy, and socialize (Mlanga, 2014).

Consequently, campus cafeteria sector is growing in importance because of the value of its services to its large student population and other segments, Consequently, empirical efforts have been directed at exploring the service delivery and customers' dining experience in campus cafeterias with a view to deepening insight and robustness and suggesting strategies for improved service delivery (Kim & Kim (2017; Price & Vigilia, 2016; Campbell, 2014). However, research findings appear to be inconclusive due to peculiarity of geographical and demographic contexts, thus necessitating the need for further explorations.

Nevertheless, there is a common consensus that the dynamics of market characteristics and the involvement of human elements make hospitality offerings vulnerable to service failure. Therefore, one of the major tasks of cafeterias today is matching customers' expectations and experiences due to the fact that they demand more value for their money when spending at cafeteria ((Grunert, 2005). This is easily discernable through their switching behaviour towards any new eatery. Therefore, a study to determine the effect of food service attributes on customers' dining experience for patronage in cafeteria has been advocated.



Adiele, Justin, M. & Gabriel (2013) hint that service delivery is characterized by certain attributes such as price, value, setting, quality etc. However, the validity of this postulation to the campus cafeterias context and their effect on students' patronage has not been ascertained empirically in the context of University campuses in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study is undertaken to evaluate the effect of food service attributes and students' patronage in the University of Port Harcourt.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 The Concept of Food Service Attributes

Food service attributes refer to food service characteristics that customers used in evaluating their offer (Lugosi, 2019).

Some specific characteristics of the Away From Home (AFH) food offer have been particularly pointed out in this phenomenon. The first characteristic is the nutritional quality of the food offered, several studies indeed, reports larger portions size and poorer nutritional quality of AFH food (Lin and Morrison, 2012). Another characteristic is the context in which the food is offered, a greater availability of energy dense foods, a lower availability of healthy options and lack of information about the content of the product, have indeed been highlighted (Lachat et al, 2009, Lachat 2012).

2.1. 2 Dimensions of Food Service Attributes

Price of Food

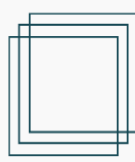
The price of a product or service is its quantitative measure of value which expresses the ability of the product / service or money in exchange. Therefore, price of food is generally expressed in monetary terms. Put differently, price is the money or something of value needed to acquire a unit or a given quantity of that product or service. Price is a major determinant of the product's demand in the market place. However, Okafor (2014) opines that managers should be interested in how much they ask for their products and balance it with how much customers are willing to pay for their products/ services (Von-Brown & Jadesse, 2012).

Food Quality

Food quality can be defined as an intrinsic property of food which meets a pre-standard requirement, in this way value of food can be determined by means of the properties with respect to nutrition, hygiene organoleptic and function of food. Caswell (1998) and Hooker they both identify five major subsets of quality attributes such as food safety, nutrition, value, package and process. Kholus and Ahasrar (2018) opine that food quality is important both the consumers and the organization. To the former, it is through food quality that the business satisfies the food of its target, while to the latter, food quality becomes a strategy for competitive advantage.

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Service Setting

The physical evidence is the outward appearance of the organization and thus can be critical in forming initial impression or setting up customer expectations (Nkamanse & Edema, 2020). Service setting plays a crucial role in the hospitality service facility and can be competitive weapon. Hospitality marketers are interested in service setting due to its influence on customers' dining experience and behavioral intentions. Research suggests that a good service setting induce long stay in the facility and supports sales and communications (Twinson, 2016).

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage represents the choice of an individual to consistently choose a particular brand of product, service or organization in their purchase behaviour (El & fathy (2015). Guest patronage is influenced by a range of factors, including the quality of services, overall guest experience, value for money, and the establishment's ability to meet evolving customer expectations (Ewanlen, 2021).

Customer patronage is important to the sustainability of cafeterias because it is the continued, reinforced purchase behaviour that guarantees increased revenue and profit which ploughed back into the business for expansion. Therefore, the enrichment of customer experience through good quality food service is key to patronage.

2.3 Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Studies on product/service attributes and customer experience have accumulated. This sub-section present a review of few extant empirical research work from which our hypotheses were formulated.

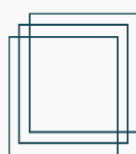
Price of Food and Customer Patronage

Oh et al., (2017) carried out a finding on the impact of price of food on customer satisfaction in West Bandung regency, Jawa Barat (West Java) province. The results of the study concluded that price of food is an important variable that significantly affect customer satisfaction positively.

Suskal, et al., (2014) conducted a research on the impact of price of food on customer satisfaction. The research was conducted in Pakistan with a population 567 respondents. The study revealed a direct positive relationship between price of food and customer satisfaction.

Service Setting / Environment and Customer Patronage

Nan and Sean (2017), did a study on service setting on customer patronage of hospitality industries (cafeteria) in south-south zone of Nigeria. 14 quoted hospitality industries were used for the study.



The result of the analysis showed that there is a strong positive and significant correlation between service setting and customer patronage.

Nan and Sean (2020), did a study on the impact of food service attribute on customer satisfaction on rural university campus environment. The result indicated that customer satisfaction with different service attribute had a significant and positive relationship.

Food Quality and Customer Patronage

Grunert (2005) carried out a study on the effect of quality of food on customer satisfaction. The study was conducted in Jordan, the data collected was 283, The findings showed that food quality had a positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Previous researches suggested that food quality, physical environment and service are the major components of overall cafeteria service setting (El and Fathy,2005). Among these attributes, food quality is the most important dimension of the restaurants.

From the above, the following research hypotheses were deduced:

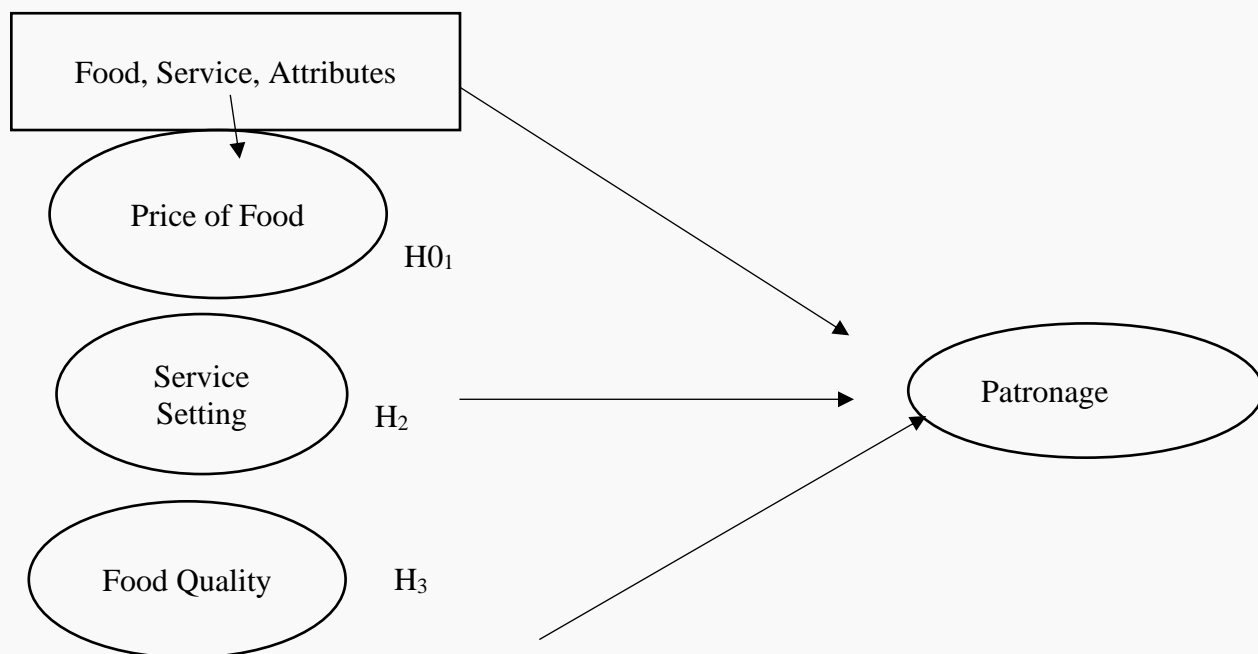
H1: Price of food and customer patronage are correlated in cafeterias in Uniport.

H2: Service setting / environment and customer patronage are correlated in cafeterias in Uniport.

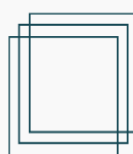
H3: Food quality and customer patronage are correlated in cafeterias in Uniport

The hypothesized relationship implied in the review provided the basis for hypotheses development for our study which is depicted in the research model as shown in the diagram below;

Operational Frame Work of the Study



Source: Researchers' operational framework showing relationship between the dimension of food service attribute and customer patronage.



3. Methodology

Research Design and Population of the Study

The research design adopted in this study was the survey method to aid data collection from a large spectrum of customers of cafeterias at University of Port Harcourt in order to address the research questions and test the hypotheses of the study.

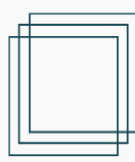
The population for this study comprised customers of 15 cafeterias in the University of Port Harcourt. The assessable population consisted of Emmatex Mama Abuja, mama Ofrima, Genesis, Kilimanjaro, Finger licking, Sammies, Forks and Fringers, yummers' files, God bless, Authentic worldwide restaurant, Goshen kitchen, Best kitchen and H.M.T. kitchen, etc. Given the nature of the study, the population size (customers) was large and unknown as it could not be numerically pre-determined.

Table 1: Some Cafeteria and their Location in the University of Port Harcourt.

S/N	Names of Cafeterias	Location
1	Emmatex	Abuja Campus (Oferima)
2	Mama Abuja	Abuja Campus (Park)
3	Finger licking	Abuja Campus (Park)
4	Yummers' fries	Abuja Campus (Park)
5	God Bless	Abuja Campus (Park)
6	Mama Oferima	Oferima
7	Sammies	Choba Junction
8	Gensis	Choba Junction
9	Kilimajaro	Choba Junction
10	Authentic World-Wide	Choba Campus
11	Lizzy Best	Choba Campus
12	Goshen Kitchen	Choba Campus
13	Best Kitchen	Choba Campus
14	Forks and fingers	Faculty of Agriculture
15	H.M.T Kitchen	Hospitality and Tourism Management (Abuja Campus)

Sample Procedure/Sample Size Determination

Freund and Williams's formula was used to determine the sample size 278. The numbers of customers that actually participated in the study were those available at the fifteen (15) cafeterias during the researcher's visit. The researcher made sure to get 278 customers to participate in the survey after explaining the purpose of the study to them. This was done during week days and weekends to enable the researcher to get good numbers of the customers in the survey based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Thus, the 278 customers were purposively selected across the 15 cafeteria on two campuses of University of Port Harcourt.



Data collection and Instrument Design

Primary data were collected using questionnaire structured in English language. The choice of adopting the questionnaire is that it is the best means of eliciting relevant written information from the respondents for the study. The questionnaire for this study will be divided into three; section A, B, C. Section A sought information on the demographic profiles of the respondents, section B sought data on Food service attributes and has in it 12 items, whereas section C sought data on customer satisfaction and has 4 items in it.

5-point likert scale was adopted in structuring the questionnaire; strongly agree(SA)=5, agree(A)=4, neutral(N)=3, disagree(D)=2, strongly disagree(SD)=1.

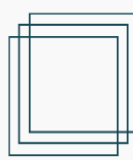
Validity and reliability of the Research Instrument

In other to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, the researcher employed the use of face validity on the questionnaire which was based on subjective evaluation. This assessment was ascertained by hospitality management academics and practitioners. On the basis of this review, few changes were made to some of the items. The reliability of this research instrument was ascertained with the use of Cronbach alpha co-efficient for all the items which were above 0.7 threshold.

Operational Measure of Variable and Data Analysis Techniques

The independent variable of the study was food service attributes while the dependent variable of the study was customer satisfaction. The independent variable was measured along the dimensions of Price of food, Service Setting and food quality. The dependent variable was measured using Patronage. The variable was measured at an intervallic scale. The 5-point likert scale was used as shown below; Strongly agree (SA) = 5; Agree (A) = 4; Neutral (N) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; Strongly disagree (SD) = 1

The multiple regression analytical tool was adopted for the study to determine the impact of each of the three dimensions of food service attributes on customers' patronage.



4. Analysis and Results

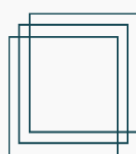
Table 2 Demographic profile of respondents

S/No	Demographic variables	No	Percent
1	Gender		
	Male	136	51
	Female	128	49
	Total	264	100
2	Age		
	18 - 25 years	77	29
	26 - 35 years	68	26
	36 - 45years	56	21
	45 – 55years	43	16
	56 years & above.	20	8
	Total	264	100
3	Educational qualification		
	SSCE/O'level	71	30
	B.Sc/B.Ed/HND	88	33
	Master's Degree	58	22
	Ph.D	17	6
	Others	30	11
	Total	264	100

Table 2, section 1 above shows the information on gender. The table revealed that (136) respondents (51%) were male while (128) respondents (49%) female. This implies that female respondents were of the majority.

The information on age brackets of the respondents in section 2 of Table above shows that 77 respondents (29%), were within 18 - 25 years, 68 respondents (26%) were within 26 – 35 years, 56 respondents (21%) were within 36 - 45 years, while 43 respondents (16%) were within 45 – 55years, 20 respondents (8%) were 56 years and above. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within the ages of 18 – 25 years.

Section 3 of Table 2 above shows information on the respondents' level of education. SSCE (71respondents) (30%). BSc/ B.Ed/HND (88 respondents) (33%), Master's (58 respondents) (22%), Ph.D (17 respondents) (6%) while those with other qualification (30 respondents) with a response rate of 11%. From the information it shows that respondents with B.Sc were of the majority.



Univariate Analyses

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on items of price of food

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reasonable price of food	264	3.6894	.96715
Regular upward review of food price	264	3.7234	1.10136
Good value for the price	264	3.8191	1.08720
Valid N (listwise)	264		

Grand mean = 3.9 (acceptability threshold)

As the table shows, all the mean scores of the items of price were less than the threshold of 3.9 (grand mean). The implication is that respondents did not generally agree that the price of food was good.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on items of quality of food.

Food Quality Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Fresh and hot food always served.	264	3.9681	1.08213
Tasty food served always	264	4.0957	.97351
Good quality food served always.	264	3.9149	.99092
Food presentation by courteous service personal	264	3.7872	1.03563
Valid N (listwise)	264		

Grand mean = 3.9 (acceptability threshold)

As the table shows, the mean scores of 3 items of food quality were greater than the threshold of 3.9 (grand mean). This shows an average agreement by the respondents on the fact that the food was always served hot, tasty food served and of excellent quality. However, the respondents did not generally agree that the food companies usually present their food very well and by courteous service personnel.

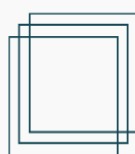


Table 5: Descriptive statistics on items of service setting/environment

Service setting/environment items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Easiness/convenience of movement	264	4.1383	.85006
Cleanliness	264	3.9894	.88591
Napkins and condiments availability	264	3.4894	1.22470
Sufficient seats and tables	264	4.0106	1.03170
Valid N (listwise)	264		

Grand mean = 3.9 (acceptability threshold)

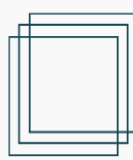
As the table shows, the mean score of one item of service setting/environment was less than the threshold of 3.9 (grand mean). This shows that the respondents generally agreed that the service setting was fair or tolerable.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics on items of patronage

Items of Patronage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I eat at this place regularly	264	3.7872	1.00400
I like to patronise the quick service restaurant	264	3.8830	.87813
The service I receive makes me to repurchase more	264	3.7766	1.01763
I say positive things about this quick service restaurant	264	3.7872	.98234
Valid N (listwise)	264		

Grand mean = 3.9 (acceptability threshold)

As the table shows, all the mean scores of patronage was less than the threshold of 3.9 (grand mean). This suggests that most of the respondents did not eat at a particular cafeteria regularly.



Bivariate Analysis

Table 7 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.945 ^a	.892	.889	.33930

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service setting/Environment, Quality of Food, Price of food

Table 7 shows that R is .945, and represents the simple correlation between the dimensions of food service attributes (price of food, quality of food and service setting/environment,) and customer patronage which is a measure for customer satisfaction and is very high. R² value ("R" Square) is .892 and adjusted R square is .889. This implies that 89.2% of the variance in customer patronage (customer satisfaction) can be explained by the changes in independent variables of price of food, quality of food and service setting/environment. With the regression model able to explain more than 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: customer patronage (Ekueme, 2015), this model is considered as a 'good fit'.

Table 8 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	85.947	3	28.649	248.857	.000 ^b
	Residual	10.361	90	.115		
	Total	96.309	93			

a. Dependent Variable: Patronage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Service setting/Environment, Quality of Food, Price of food

From Table 8, the result of the analysis shows that F value was significant (p=.000). With this result, the model is valid and it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between the food service attributes and customer patronage which describes the disposition of customers to be satisfied.

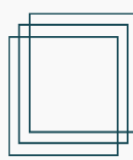


Table 9 Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.514	.187		2.742	.007
1 Price of food	.377	.117	.359	3.226	.002
Quality of Food	.004	.113	.004	.040	.968
Service setting/Environment	.498	.080	.600	6.218	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Patronage

Table 9, provides the multiple regression analysis for the contribution of the three dimensions of food service attributes used in the study and hypothesised as H01, H02 and H03 respectively. The table shows that un-standardized beta (β) of food price, food quality and service/environment are: ($\beta = 0.377$), ($\beta = 0.004$), and ($\beta = 0.498$) respectively. This specifies that service setting/environment made the greatest contribution to the model.

The result of the regression analysis shows that service setting/environment, ($\beta = 0.498$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$) and price of food ($\beta = 0.377$, $p=0.002 > 0.05$) provided by campus cafeteria in Port Harcourt in influencing their customers' patronage which in turn enhances the customer satisfaction made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable, while food quality ($\beta = 0.004$, $p=0.968 > 0.05$) did not. Therefore, the model can be written as:

$$\text{Patronage} = 0.498(\text{DI}) + 0.377(\text{DA}) + 0.004(\text{FA}) + .514.$$

The model suggest that by associating any of the three dimensions of food service attributes of a campus restaurant, the empirical model can increase the level of customers' satisfaction measured by patronage when other things remain constant. Accordingly therefore, changes in service setting, at the campus restaurant can have the biggest influence on level of customers patronage as its beta co-efficient ($\beta = 0.496$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$) is the highest and significant.

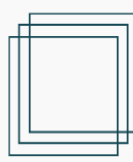
Testing of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

Decision Rule

If $PV < 0.05 =$ Reject H_0

$PV > 0.05 =$ Accept H_0

H1: The outcome of analysis show that price of food had significant effect on customers patronage to the campus cafeterias in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.377$, $p=0.002 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted



H₂: The outcome of analysis show that food quality had no significant effect on patronage to the campus restaurant in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.004$, $p=0.968 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

H₃: The outcome of analysis show that service setting/environment had significant effect on patronage to the campus restaurant in Port Harcourt ($\beta = 0.498$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

5. Discussion

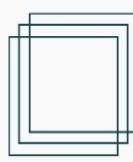
The regression analysis result suggests that the price of food has significant effect on patronage ($\beta = 0.377$, $p=0.002 < 0.05$). Thus, the alternative hypothesis (**HA₁**) is accepted as price of food has significant effect on patronage in the context of fast food restaurants on campus in Port Harcourt. This finding is consistent with Campbell, et al (2014). In a university environment where students who depend on their parents for economic support are the target market, the price of food will actually be an important determinant of patronage in a food restaurant.

Regarding our second hypothesis, the Multiple Regression result indicated that quality of food has no significant effect on patronage ($\beta = 0.004$, $p=0.986 > 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis (**H₀₂**) was accepted as quality of food has no significant effect on patronage in the context of fast food restaurants on campuses in Port Harcourt. This finding is inconsistent with Adnan-Ai-Tih (2015). This is understandable because in a market where the customers are sensitive to price, the service providers would like to compromise on quality because of low prices.

The Multiple Regression Analysis and result of hypothesis three showed that service setting/environment had a significant effect on patronage ($\beta = 0.498$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$). Thus, the alternative hypothesis (**HA₃**) was accepted as service setting/environment has significant effect on patronage in the context of fast food restaurants on campuses in Port Harcourt. This finding is consistent with Lake and Townsend (2016). A fast food that satisfies its customers through good elements of customer service and good physical environment will likely have customers that will spread positive word-of-mouth about the organizations to others including family members and friends.

6. Conclusion, Implications/Recommendations

This study examined the effect of food service attributes on customer satisfaction in campus cafeterias in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. This research effort has fulfilled its objectives by empirically determining the effect of price of food, quality of food and service setting/environment on customer patronage.



The findings showed that price of food and service setting/environment had significant effect on customer patronage, while quality of food did not in the context of campus fast food restaurants operating in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The fast food industry in every location faces multiple pressures through intensive competition and by implication restaurants have to adapt to greater level of product, pricing and service strategies with a view to satisfying their customer as well as achieving competitive advantage in the marketplace. The study concludes that product, pricing, and service innovation strategies are central to restaurants' future growth and performance because it helps in enhancing the satisfaction level of service organizations.

The findings of this study hold certain implications/recommendations for fast food operators on campuses of tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt in particular and Nigeria in general. They are as follows:

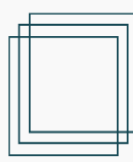
- i. Prices should be properly communicated to the customers in terms of quality of food and should reflect value.
- ii. The fast food restaurants should maintain high standard of food quality.
- iii. Service innovativeness should be pursued with a view to delighting their customers as well as potential consumers.
- iv. Employee training should form part of the service marketing strategy to enhance quality service delivery.

7. Suggestion for further research

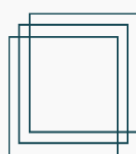
In the future, further research effort should be directed towards expanding the study scope to other regions of the country.

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