

SERVICE QUALITY AND BRAND AWARENESS IN CHAIN FAST FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2022.1.10>

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Abstract

This study explored the influence fast food service quality dimensions, reliability, tangibles, and responsiveness on brand awareness in Southeast Nigeria. Three objectives and three research hypotheses guided the study. The study population comprised all consumers of products and services of chain fast food establishments in the study area. The researcher used Cochran (1977) formula for determining sample size for infinite population and it gave a sample size of 323. An adapted version of a 16 itemed pre-validated questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection that was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test and a coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. Accessibility sampling technique was used for the study while descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in data analysis using SPSS version 23 package. Findings revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between each of the service quality dimensions under study and brand awareness with tangibles dimension having the highest score (0.329), responsiveness dimension having (0.267), and reliability dimension having (0.125). In view of the findings, it is concluded that fast food service quality has significant influence on brand awareness in the study area. It is recommended that operators of fast-food establishments should ensure that service promises made are kept to the delight of the consumers, and that continuous improvement of the physical features of fast-food establishments should be made a priority as this not only makes the brands competitive but also drives brand awareness.

Keywords: Fast-food, service, quality, brand, awareness, consumer, equity.

Introduction

The fast-food sector is experiencing increased competitive pressures as a consequence of the combined effects of the worldwide economic and technological advancement as well as globalization. The increased competitive atmosphere in fast food operations has modified the service delivery ethos and intensified the need for research on service quality. Furthermore, the increasingly knowledgeable, hedonic, and discerning consumers are more eager than ever before to switch their allegiance to other companies perceived

as providers of better-quality products and services (Anyanwu, 2019). According to Mohammad and Alhamadani (2011), service quality is the life blood of every service organization.

Today's consumers are better informed, savvy, sophisticated, and understand the motives of marketers and do not give in easily. With an increasing dynamism and competitive nature of the business environment, it has become imperative for fast food organizations to pay attention to service quality and its improvement cues. Service quality is considered the extent to which the needs or expectations of the customers are met in a service encounter (Anyanwu, 2019). Thus, it is predicted that customers will judge quality as 'low' if performance does not meet their expectations and as 'high' when performance meets or exceeds expectations (Suman & Garg, 2012). Customer's evaluation of service quality and the resulting level of satisfaction are perceived to affect bottom line measures of business success (Huang & Savigolla, 2011; Kofi, Zakari & Soali, 2013)

The perceived high premium placed on service quality by consumers implies that it might influence consumer decision-making and brand acceptability. Brand acceptability relates to brand equity and consumer-based brand equity covers brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness is defined as the ability of a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of certain product category (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993). Thus, the ability of a consumer to identify a brand in the midst of other competing brands is a reasoned action formed on account of what is seen or heard. Huang & Sarigöllü, (2011) maintain that brand awareness influences customer decision-making, particularly for low-involvement packaged goods and strengthens brand performance in the market and precedes building brand equity in the consumer's mind-set. The image surrounding a company's brand is the major source of its competitive edge (Makeeva, 2010; Jasinskas, Reklaitiene, & Svagzdiene, 2013; Umesh, 2014; Balciunas, Jasinskas & Koisoava, 2014; Dabija, Dinu, Tăchiciu, & Pop, 2014).

Various views on service quality models can be identified as follows; Process Orientation (Gronroos 1984 cited in Anyanwu 2019), Lodging Quality Index (Getty & Getty 2003 cited in Garga & Abdu, 2016), and HOLSERV (Mazamder & Hasan 2014). However, these perspectives of service quality have not received the same attention and empirical testing as SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) cited in Anyanwu (2019) which has impacted the way in which service quality is measured. Out of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model, only three were considered in this study (tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness).

Findings of previous studies suggest that service quality can influence consumer-based brand equity dimensions, brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty and perceived quality. Hirut (2015) explored the influence of service quality on consumer-based brand equity in the banking sector in Ethiopia and observed that service quality can predict a good proportion of the variance in consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

Results of similar studies by He & Li, 2011; Kiumarsi, Mohd Isa & Jayaraman, 2015; Esmaeilpour, Mohamadi, & Rajabi (2016); Zohaib (2016); Fayez & Noor (2017); and Anyanwu (2019) Amaechi & Anyanwu (2019) lay credence to this assertion.

Kumar (2008) argued that service quality is contributed by not only the service itself, but also the production process, the time of production, the service provider's behavior to the customers, the delivery process, and the waiting time for accepting service. Ogunjinmi, Shaibu, Ojo, & Ajayi (2019) maintain that service quality also influences place attachment of tourists. However, observations have shown that customers of fast-food products in Southeast Nigeria often grumble over the adequacy of the service received, service delivery contracts, wrong pricing, improper billing, poor handling of customer complaints, sluggishness, poor layout, appearance of service providers, and poor response during rush hours and periods of service failure. These are issues that border on the image of these establishments and could smear same thus misrepresenting their brand identity since customers act as they perceive. Moreover, it appears not much has been done empirically to demonstrate the influence of service quality on brand awareness particularly in fast food operations in Southeast Nigeria. This is a major knowledge gap that this study aims to fill.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine the influence of service quality on brand awareness in chain fast food establishments in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study explored the various ways that brand awareness of chain fast-food establishments is influenced by the following dimensions of service quality:

1. Reliability
2. Tangibles
3. Responsiveness.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significant guided the study:

H0₁: Reliability dimension of fast-food service quality does not significantly influence fast food brand awareness.

H0₂: Tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality does not significantly influence fast food brand awareness.

H0₃: Responsiveness dimension of fast-food service quality does not significantly influence fast food brand awareness.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study adopted a quantitative research design (descriptive survey) because it helps to study people's attitudes, motivation and characteristics.

This research design was considered suitable on account of having been used successfully in previous related studies: Kiumarsi, Mohd Isa & Jayaraman, 2015; Esmaeilpour, Mohamadi, & Rajabi (2016); Zohaib (2016); Fayez & Noor (2017); and Anyanwu (2019).

Area of the Study

The study covered consumers of chain fast food establishments in South-East Nigeria. Southeast Nigeria is made up of five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Umuahia is the capital of Abia State, Awka is the capital of Anambra State, Abakaliki is the capital of Ebonyi State, Enugu is the capital of Enugu State and Owerri is the capital of Imo State. The Southeast Nigeria is naturally endowed. Coal was discovered around Enugu by British explorers who arrived at Ngwo by 1909. Imo and Abia States have crude oil deposits in commercial quantities. Ebonyi state has salt and limestone deposits. Anambra State and Abia State have the largest markets in the entire region that attract many international businessmen to South-Eastern Nigeria (Ugoani, 2011).

Concerning fast food business operations, Southeast Nigeria has its own fair share when compared with other geo-political zones in Nigeria. Notable chain fast food establishments operating in the region are Sweet Sensation, Crunches, Mr. Biggs, Kilimanjaro, Apples, Chicken Republic. It is believed that data generated from the consumers of these chain fast food establishments will be adequate in achieving the objectives of this study.

Population of the Study

In this study, consumers of chain fast food establishments in Southeast Nigeria formed the study population and it was an infinite population. The choice of these establishments is hinged on the belief that chains fast food organizations have standard and at the same time have visible presence in the region

Sample for the Study

The sample size was determined using the formula for estimating sample size for an infinite population by Cochran (1977) cited in Hirut (2015), and Zohaib (2016) which gave 323 as the sample size. The breakdown of the establishments and the copies of the instrument administered are presented as follows: Abakaliki: Mr. Biggs (16), Crunchies (25), Awka: Chicken Republic (20), Crunchies (29), Enugu: Chicken Republic (26), Kilimanjaro (23), Crunchies (31), Owerri: Kilimanjaro (30), Mr. Biggs (16), Crunchies (31), and Umuahia: Kilimanjaro (30), Crunchies (30), Mr. Biggs (15).

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a pre-validated 16 itemed questionnaire which had two sections. Section A sought to collect biodata of respondents, while B contained measurements of variables for the study. The

researchers adapted the instrument from the studies of Hirut (2015), and Zohaib (2016). Service quality variables (reliability, tangibles, and responsiveness) had 5 items, 4 items, and 4 items respectively and were used to predict brand awareness that had 3 items. On each of the items, respondents were requested to indicate their opinion on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (4 point), Agree (3 point), Disagreed (2 point), and Strongly Disagreed (1 point). The instrument was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained confirming the usability of the instrument.

Data Collection Technique

Accessibility sampling technique was employed for the study. Only accessible customers served as respondents. However, the administration of the instrument was based on the seating capacity of each of the chain fast food establishments. This was achieved through the help of five research assistants (RAs). These RAs were trained on how to collect the data and all the copies of the instrument administered were retrieved on the spot. However, only 305 copies of the instrument were found usable for the study representing 94.43% of the total number.

Data Analysis Technique

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics on SPSS version 23. The three specific objectives of the study were achieved using the following regression model:

$$BA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(RelD) + \beta_2(TanD) + \beta_3(ResD) + ei \dots \dots \dots (i)$$

Where

β_0	=	Constant
$\beta_0 - \beta_3$	=	Parameters
BA	=	Brand Awareness
RelD	=	Reliability Dimension
TanD	=	Tangible Dimension
ResD	=	Responsiveness Dimension
ei	=	Error term.

Results of the Study

Table 1: Analysis of Brand Awareness and Service Quality Dimensions

S/No..	Brand Awareness	Mean	Decision
1.	Material markers of this fast-food outfit come to my mind quickly (e.g. name, logo, design)	2.60	Agreed
2.	I do not easily recognize this fast-food outfit quickly among other competing fast-food outfits	1.93	Disagreed
3.	I am not familiar with this fast-food outfit	2.10	Disagreed

Reliability Dimension

4.	Fulfilling and keeping promises is the basic factor for choosing this brand	2.75	Agreed
5.	Customer confidence in the brand to deliver on promise develops trust, leading to customer retention	2.92	Agreed
6.	I do not feel favored and secure using this fast-food outfit	1.84	Disagreed
7.	The service providers and employees are competent and dependable	2.77	Agreed
8.	I frequently recommend this brand to others because of reliability and confidentiality in handling customer problems	3.05	Agreed
Tangibles Dimension			
9.	Material markers of this fast-food outfit (e.g. name, logo, and designs) readily come to my mind as well as the availability of modern gadgets and facilities such as POS, cash registers, CCTV, and furniture.	3.00	Agreed
10.	Ambience and layout of facilities are key to select this fast-food outfit	2.88	Agreed
11.	Neat appearance of service providers of this fast-food outfit makes me to choose this outfit over others	3.08	Agreed
12.	The appearance of the physical facilities of this outfit is not in keeping with the type of services provided	2.08	Disagreed
Responsiveness Dimension			
13.	I prefer this fast-food outfit because the service providers deliver services exactly when needed	3.07	Agreed
14.	This fast-food outfit is ever ready to respond to customer requests	2.99	Disagreed
15.	Meals and beverages are not served in proper and right temperature	2.20	Disagreed
16.	This fast-food outfit does not provide solution to customer complaints	1.83	Disagreed

Source: SPSS version 23 (2018).

Table 1 reveals that the respondents disagreed on items 2, 3, 6, 12, 15, and 16 as each had a mean score of less than 2.50. This shows that respondents do not easily recognize chain fast establishments quickly among competing establishments, not familiar with chain fast food establishments, and do not feel favored and secure using the establishments. Respondents also disagreed that the physical facilities are not in keeping with the type of services

provided, meals and beverages are not served in proper temperature, and that the establishments do not provide solution to customer complaints.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Estimate for the Influence of Service Quality Dimensions on Brand Awareness

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-Statistic	Sig.
Reliability Dimension	0.125	0.039	0.235	3.241	0.001
Tangibles Dimension	0.329	0.036	0.461	9.156	0.000
Responsiveness Dimension	0.239	0.058	0.302	4.142	0.000
(Constant)	2.239	0.512		4.374	0.000
R-Square	0.273				
Adjusted R-Square	0.266				
F-Statistic	37.755				
Sig.	0.000				

Source: Formatted from SPSS 23 Regression Result

Table 2 indicates that R-square (0.273) depicts fitness of model and the F-statistics (37.755) reveals that the model is significant as p-value is < 0.000 at 5% significant level. Thus, the unbiased proportion of the total variation observed in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables is 0.266. This means that the service quality dimensions explained about 26.6% of the total variation observed in brand awareness. In other words, the service quality dimensions exert about 26.6% influence on brand awareness. The coefficient of reliability dimension is 0.125, meaning that there is a positive relationship between reliability dimension of fast-food service quality and fast-food brand awareness. This implies that an increase in reliability dimension of fast-food service quality will lead to about 0.125 increase in fast food brand awareness. The t-statistic value of 3.241 and sig. probability value of 0.001 indicate that the positive relationship between reliability dimension of fast-food service quality and brand awareness is statistically significant at 5% significance level, because the probability value is less than 0.05. Thus, the study rejected the null hypothesis, and accepted the alternative that reliability dimension of fast-food service quality significantly influences fast food brand awareness.

Similarly, Table 2, revealed that the coefficient of tangibles dimension is 0.329. This indicates that there is a positive relationship between tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality and fast-food brand awareness in the study area. This means that a unit increase in tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality will lead to about 0.329 proportional increase in fast food brand awareness. Considering the t-statistic and the sig. probability of 9.156 and 0.000 respectively, it is evidential that the relationship between tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality and fast-food brand awareness is

statistically significant at 5% significance level, since the probability value is less than 0.05. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative that tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality significantly influences fast food brand awareness.

Table 2 equally revealed that the coefficient of responsiveness dimension is shown as 0.239. This means that an increase in responsiveness dimension will lead to about 0.239 proportional increase in fast food brand awareness. The t-statistic value of 4.142 and sig. probability of 0.0.000 indicates that the positive relationship between responsiveness dimension of fast-food service quality and fast-food brand awareness is statistically significant at 5% level, subsequent upon the fact that the sig. probability value is less than 0.05. This implies that responsiveness dimension of fast-food service quality has significant positive relationship with fast food brand awareness in the study area. Thus, the study rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative that responsiveness dimension of fast-food service quality significantly influences fast food brand awareness.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the inferential statistics in Table 2 revealed that reliability dimension of fast-food service quality has significant influence on fast food brand awareness in the study area. This finding is in line with the findings of Hirut (2015); Esmailpour, et al, (2016); and Fayeze and Noor (2017). Reliability is an important service quality dimension that leaves an indelible experience in the minds of consumers. During purchase decision-making, consumers do recall their past service experiences in terms of the ability of the company to handle customer service problems, performing service right the first time, keeping servicing promises, and proper billing procedure. These issues contribute to creating awareness and thereby tend to influence the impression consumers have about a fast-food establishment.

findings in Table 2 revealed that tangibles dimension of fast-food service quality has significant influence on fast food brand awareness. The results of the studies carried out by Hirut (2015); Zohaib (2016); and Fayeze and Noor (2017) are in agreement with this finding. Tangibles dimension makes brand differentiation possible, more so in fast food operations where the products traded are strikingly the same. Appearance of service providers, physical facilities, and other material markers such as logo and trademark, create awareness and differentiate the company's offerings from those of competitors. All these help the company to stand out and facilitate easy recognition of the brand and its offerings by consumers.

The findings of the study further revealed in Table 2 that responsiveness dimension of fast-food service quality has significant influence on fast food brand awareness in the study area. This finding is not contrary to the results obtained by Hirut (2015); Esmailpour, et al, (2016) and Fayeze and Noor (2017). Consumers desire quick, prompt, timely, and fast services from providers. If a fast-food company is reputable in terms of being responsive in-

service delivery, there will be the likelihood that the awareness index of the company will soar, as satisfied consumers will become unpaid marketing ambassadors of such a company. According to Fayeze and Noor (2017), building a strong brand which is favourable in the minds of customers, investing in high quality service delivery, and creating exceptional customer experience atmosphere is critical in creating brand awareness and differentiation in fast food operations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that fast food service quality dimensions (reliability, tangibles, and responsiveness) have significant influence on fast food brand awareness in the study area. In view of the findings, managers and operators of fast-food establishments should ensure that service promises made are kept to the delight of consumers as this contributes to driving brand awareness through positive word of mouth communication. Continuous improvement and upgrading of the physical facilities and other material markers of fast-food establishments should be made a top priority by operators as this not only contributes to their competitiveness but also drives brand awareness. Training of service providers should be made a continuous exercise to improve their level of responsiveness in service delivery as this generates positive word of mouth thereby creating brand awareness. It is therefore suggested that future researchers should carry out further studies using other dimensions of service quality to determine its influence in driving brand awareness in food service establishments.

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