

## SERVICE QUALITY DELIVERY AND CUSTOMERS' PATRONAGE OF EATERIES

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined service quality delivery and customers' patronage of eateries. Its specific purpose was to explore the effects of restaurant service quality attributes such as convenience, customization, staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients on customers' patronage of eatery firms. Cross-sectional survey research design was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain primary data from 357 customers of eatery firms and data obtained for the study were tested using multiple linear regression. The findings of the study revealed that service convenience, customization, staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients had significant positive effects on customer patronage of eatery firms. The study recommended that managers of eatery firms should provide convenient by maintaining multiple ordering/payment options for remarkable dining experiences to customers; customization should be prioritized in eateries by ensuring that customers have access to diverse menu options that they can personalize to their tastes; managers of eateries should ensure that front-desk customer service personnel are knowledgeable about their products; and managers of eateries should consistently incorporate customer-friendly innovative technologies to enable customers enjoy improved service. Eateries should use improved quality of ingredients that is organic to safeguard customers' health.*

**Keywords:** *Service quality delivery, convenience, customization, staff competence, service innovation, quality of ingredients and customers' patronage*

## Introduction

Consistent customer patronage plays a critical role in the performance, competitiveness, and survival of fast-food restaurants. It drives financial success, enhances market competitiveness, and provides stability in an industry known for its high failure rates (Michael *et al.*, 2012). In recognition of the critical imperatives of customer patronage to business performance, fast-food restaurants around the world are implementing several marketing strategies to attract customer patronage. One of such marketing strategies popular among fast-food restaurants is quality service delivery (Amzat *et al.*, 2020; Olokundun *et al.*, 2019; Abdullah *et al.*, 2023).

According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988), service quality is the overall assessment of the excellence or superiority of a service and the extent to which it meets or exceeds customer expectations. It has become a useful differentiator marketing strategy infused into the service delivery processes of restaurants around the world. This is because, in today's highly competitive food industry where numerous dining options are available, providing exceptional service has become crucial for standing out from the crowd. Service quality plays a vital role in shaping a restaurant's brand image (Nkosi *et al.*, 2023; Etuk, Anyadighibe, James & Mbaka, 2020; Tanaka *et al.* 2018; Chen *et al.* 2017). In addition, high service quality helps create a positive and memorable dining experience for customers.

It is imperative to note that as health concerns increase around the world, the patronage of fast-food restaurants is gradually declining, especially among middle aged and aged consumers. A recent report by Enterprise Apps Today suggests that most customers of fast-food restaurants fall between the ages of 20 – 39 years, while people of 40 years and above tend to avoid eateries on health grounds (Elad, 2023, Etuk, *et al.* (2023). In Nigeria, there are concerns about the quality and safety of fast-food eateries, which has affected customer patronage, particularly among health-conscious individuals. Reports of food contamination, poor hygiene practices, and the use of low-quality ingredients have raised concerns about food safety. Such incidents can lead to foodborne illnesses and pose a significant health risk, deterring health-conscious individuals from choosing fast food as a dining option. Similarly, the lack of transparency in food preparation and sourcing of ingredients has also contributed to consumer scepticism. Health-conscious individuals often prioritize fresh and nutritious ingredients, and they are more likely to seek detailed information about the food they consume or resort to home-based meals.

This is because of the growing perception of fast food among Nigerians as being inherently unhealthy due to its high levels of fat, sodium, and sugar. Alternatively, medical professionals and health-based entities are campaigning for consumers to strive for balanced diets and seek healthier alternatives that align with their dietary preferences and goals. The limited options for nutritious meals at fast-food restaurants often fail to meet their expectations, leading them to explore healthier alternatives. How then can fast-food eateries improve the quality of their meals and services to offer nutritious, healthy meals to customers in order to encourage sustained

patronage?

In search of answers to this question, a preliminary scoping review of existing literature was carried out, which led to the identification of relevant study gaps. It was observed that although a substantial number of studies have been carried on service quality and customer patronage of restaurants in Nigeria, majority of them utilized conventional SERVQUAL dimensions to assess service quality (Adewale & Adeyemi, 2018; Amaeshi *et al.*, 2020; Okpara *et al.*, 2019; Adebayo & Alao, 2020; Olaniran & Ojikutu, 2019; Amzat *et al.*, 2020; Olokundun *et al.*, 2019; Etuk, Anyadighibe, Amadi & James, 2022).

While SERVQUAL (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibility) may provide a holistic framework for measuring service quality, it does not always reliably capture the parameters of service quality in all case studies under investigation (Cheung, 2000; Johnson, 2015). To this end, scholars suggest that contemporary studies should adapt SERVQUAL dimensions to the specific contexts of their studies in order to accommodate the peculiarities of service quality in those contexts (Schmidt, 2008; Johnson, 2015; Cheung, 2000), Aniebiet Etuk *et al* 2022. To that end, guided by extant studies (Mwangi *et al.*, 2022; Abdullah *et al.*, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2023; Ning *et al.*, 2022; Ogutu *et al.*, 2023), this study was designed to explore the effect of service quality on customer patronage of eateries, using adapted dimensions such as convenience, customization, staff competence, innovation and quality of ingredients.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To examine the effect of service convenience on customer patronage of eateries.
2. To ascertain the effect of service customization on customer patronage of eateries.
3. To determine the effect of service staff competence on customer patronage of eateries.
4. To examine the effect of service innovation on customer patronage of eateries.
5. To ascertain the effect of quality of ingredients on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT)**

The expectancy-disconfirmation theory is a model used to explain how consumers evaluate and form judgments about services based on their expectations and subsequent experiences. According to this theory, individuals compare their pre-consumption expectations with their post-consumption perceptions to determine their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a product or service (Oliver, 1977 & 1980). If the actual experience exceeds the expectations, individuals may experience positive disconfirmation and feel satisfied. On the other hand, if the experience falls short of expectations, negative disconfirmation occurs, leading to dissatisfaction.

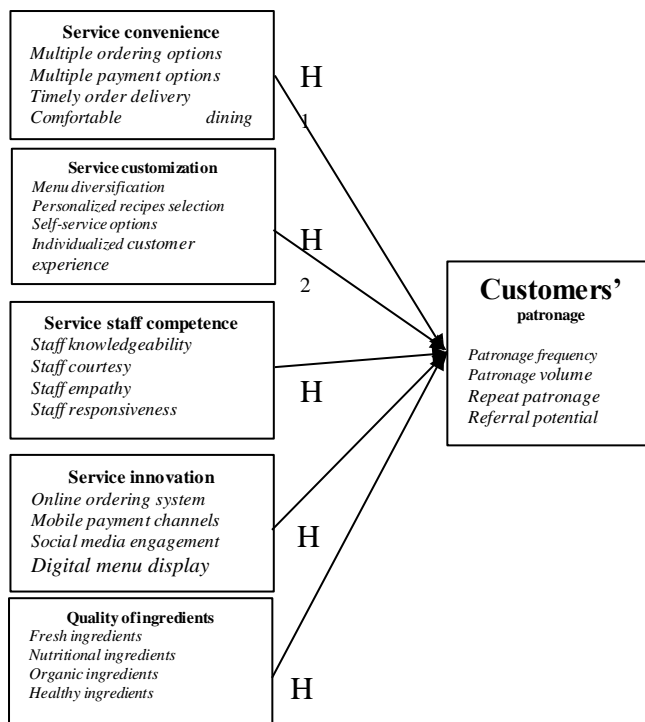
Therefore, the theory emphasizes the importance of managing and meeting customer expectations to achieve satisfaction (Sinha *et al.*, 2020). Meeting or surpassing expectations can lead to positive disconfirmation, enhance customer satisfaction, and potentially foster customer loyalty. Similarly, Filtenborg *et al.* (2017), affirmed that the expectancy disconfirmation theory helps marketers understand the role of customer expectations and the importance of delivering services that meet or exceed those expectations to achieve customer satisfaction. In the context of this study, the relevance of the theory was in its basic premise which suggested that customers of eatery firms hold certain expectations from the firms before patronizing them. These expectations may include, but are not limited to: convenience, customization, innovation, staff competence and quality of ingredients (Etuk & Akpan, 2015). The theory implies that customers are therefore satisfied if the service received meets or exceeds their expectations (positive disconfirmation), which may lead to consistent customer patronage.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Service convenience is the ease and efficiency with which customers can access and enjoy the various services provided by the restaurant. Its parameters include multiple ordering options, multiple payment options, timely order delivery and comfortable dining experience. Service customization is the ability of a restaurant to tailor its services and offerings according to the preferences and needs of individual customers. Its parameters include menu diversification, personalized recipes selection, self-service options, and individualized customer experience.

Service staff competence is the knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by restaurant employees to effectively perform their duties and provide exceptional service to customers. Its parameters include staff knowledge-ability, staff courtesy, staff empathy, and staff responsiveness. Service innovation is the development and implementation of new ideas, strategies, and processes that enhance the overall dining experience for customers. Its parameters include online ordering system, mobile payment channels, social media engagement and digital menu display.

Whereas, quality of ingredients is viewed as the overall standard and characteristics of the food items used in preparing dishes. Its parameters include fresh ingredients, nutritional ingredients, organic ingredients and healthy ingredients. Informed by extant studies, this study presumed that there is some sort of relationship between service quality and customer patronage as presented in the conceptual model in FIG.1



**FIG. 1: Conceptual model of the study**

**Source:** Parameters of independent variable adapted from Mwangi *et al.* (2022); Abdullah *et al.* (2023); Lee *et al.* (2023); Ning *et al.* (2022); Ogutu *et al.* (2023). Parameters of dependent variable adapted from Agwu *et al.* (2021); Olokundun *et al.* (2019); Edna and Wentworth (2007).

### Service Quality Delivery

Service quality refers to the overall assessment of a service's excellence and the extent to which it meets or exceeds customer expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Service quality is a critical factor in influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Etuk, Anyadighibe, Amadi & James, 2022; Amaeshi *et al.*, 2020; Adewale & Adeyemi, 2018; Anyadighibe, Awara & Esu, 2022)

In the context of fast-food restaurants, service quality refers to the level of excellence and customer satisfaction experienced by patrons during their interactions with the establishment's staff and services (Abdullah *et al.*, 2023). Staff demeanor, professionalism, and friendliness are crucial factors that contribute to a positive customer experience. Ultimately, service quality in fast-food restaurants aims to meet or exceed customer expectations, providing efficient and satisfactory service that leaves customers satisfied, thereby fostering customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

### Customers' Patronage of Restaurants

Customer patronage refers to the ongoing support that customers demonstrate towards a particular business or brand. It is a measure of the frequency and consistency with

which customers choose to engage in transactions or make purchases from a specific business (Olokundun *et al.*, 2019). Also, sustained customer patronage fosters customer feedback and insights (Agwu *et al.*, 2021). Loyal customers often provide valuable feedback, suggestions, and preferences to the business, enabling it to improve its products, services, and overall customer experience (Uford, 2018). Customer patronage directly impact on a restaurant's revenue and profitability (Abdullah *et al.*, 2023)

### **Service Convenience and Customers' Patronage**

Service convenience in the context of fast-food restaurants refers to the ease, efficiency, and overall convenience experienced by customers during their visit or interaction with the restaurant (Suzuki & Tanaka, 2022). It encompasses various aspects, including order placement, payment options, speed of service, accessibility, and customer support. According to Müller and Schmidt (2023), service convenience begins with menu customization and ordering efficiency. Fast-food restaurants have adapted to the evolving needs of their customers by providing a wide array of menu options, accommodating various dietary preferences and restrictions. The introduction of self-service kiosks and mobile ordering apps has streamlined the ordering process, allowing customers to place their orders quickly and accurately. By embracing technology, fast-food establishments have enhanced convenience; reducing wait times and ensuring greater order accuracy.

Similarly, Khan and Ahmed (2021) maintained that the emphasis on speed of delivery plays a vital role in enhancing convenience. In today's digital age, providing diverse payment options is essential for service convenience. Fast-food restaurants have integrated contactless payment methods, such as mobile wallets, and online payment platforms. These options not only expedite the transaction process but also offer convenience and flexibility to customers, reducing the need for cash transactions and minimizing waiting times at the payment counters (Mahmoud & Ali, 2022; Sok & Kim, 2017). Moreover, offering home delivery services allows fast food restaurants to reach customers who may not have time to visit the restaurant physically (Yamamoto & Nakamura, 2019). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that service convenience, as a service quality dimension, could substantially improve customers' patronage of restaurant establishments. This viewpoint is support by Abdullah *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service convenience had a significant positive relationship with customer patronage of fast- food restaurants in Amman. Ogutu *et al.* (2023), revealed that service convenience had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty intentions in casual dining restaurants in Mombasa. Thus, this study conjectures that,

H<sub>1</sub>: Service convenience has no significant effect on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Service Customization and Customers' Patronage**

In the fast-food restaurant context, service customization refers to the ability of

customers to personalize their dining experience based on their individual preferences and requirements (Schmidt & Wagner, 2018). It involves offering a range of options and choices to customers, allowing them to tailor their orders and receive a more personalized and satisfying service (Mfon & Uford, 2022). Customization of services in fast-food restaurants gives customers the ability to create their meal according to their preferences. Customers can choose the ingredients, flavors, condiments, and portions that cater to their taste buds. It gives customers a sense of control and satisfaction when they are choosing what they want to eat (Ahmed & Khan, 2021).

According to Hassan and Ibrahim (2018), customization helps fast-food restaurants to cater to the varying health needs of their customers. For example, some people may prefer gluten-free food, while others may want low-fat or low-carb meals. By offering customization, fast-food restaurants can cater to the individual needs of their customers and provide food that is healthier and more personalized. In addition, customization can lead to higher customer satisfaction and more likely to return, and even recommend the restaurant to others (Chea & Nguon 2018; Suzuki & Tanaka, 2022). Also, Müller and Schmidt (2023) maintained that service customization helps fast-food restaurants to differentiate themselves from their competitors and satisfy customers. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that service customization, as a service quality dimension, could substantially enhance customers' patronage of restaurants. This viewpoint is supported by the study of Mwangi *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service customization had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. Also, the viewpoint is reinforced by the study Lee *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service customization had a significant positive influence on customer patronage behaviour in family-style restaurants in Malaysia. Thus, this study hypothesizes that,

H<sub>2</sub>: Service customization has no significant effect on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Service Staff Competence and Customers' Patronage**

Service staff competence in the fast-food restaurant context refers to the set of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that enable employees to effectively carry out their roles and provide excellent service to customers. It encompasses various aspects, including product knowledge, communication skills, customer service aptitude, and operational efficiency (Chea & Nguon, 2018). By possessing these attributes, service staff can ensure exceptional customer experiences and contribute to the overall success of restaurants. This is why product knowledge is essential for service staff competence in restaurants (Hassan & Ibrahim, 2018). These personnel are trained to have a thorough understanding of the menu, ingredients, preparation methods, and any special dietary considerations. This knowledge allows them to provide accurate information and recommendations to customers, ensuring that they make informed choices. Effective communication skills are also crucial in fast-food restaurants (Ahmed & Khan, 2021). Service staff are trained to communicate clearly and concisely with customers, taking their orders accurately and addressing any questions

or concerns they may have.

Furthermore, Schmidt and Wagner (2018) asserted that staff empathy and customer-centricity, are essential for service staff competence in fast-food restaurants. Customers often need personalized attention, and the right customer-centric approach can significantly improve their experience. Such attention could involve engaging and welcoming them, offering recommendations, or showing an interest in their needs and preferences. A compassionate and courteous service staff can make customers feel valued and satisfied, leading to increased loyalty and patronage over time. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that service staff competence, as a service quality dimension, could substantially improve customers' patronage of restaurants. This is support by the study of Ning *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service personnel competence had a significant positive connection with customer patronage intention towards restaurants in Singapore. Similarly, Mwangi *et al.* (2022), revealed that staff competence had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. Interestingly, Abdullah *et al.* (2023), revealed that staff competence had a significant positive relationship with customer patronage of fast-food restaurants in Amman. Thus, this study hypothesizes that,

H<sub>3</sub>: Service staff competence has no significant effect on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Service Innovation and Customers' Patronage**

Service innovation in the fast-food restaurant context refers to the development and implementation of novel approaches, strategies, and practices aimed at enhancing the customer experience and delivering improved services. It involves going beyond traditional methods of operation and introducing new ideas, technologies, and processes to revolutionize the way fast-food restaurants interact with and serve their customers (Müller & Schmidt, 2023). One key aspect of service innovation in fast-food restaurants is the utilization of advanced technologies. For instance, self-service kiosks can be implemented, allowing customers to place their orders and customize their meals independently. This reduces waiting times and empowers customers to control their dining experience. Furthermore, innovative mobile apps and online platforms can be introduced, enabling customers to conveniently order, pay, and track their meals (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). These technological advancements not only streamline the ordering process but also provide opportunities for customer engagement and loyalty. Another important element of service innovation is the emphasis on customization and personalization (Suzuki & Tanaka, 2022). Fast-food restaurants can offer greater flexibility in menu options, allowing customers to tailor their orders to specific dietary preferences or restrictions.

Service innovation also involves reimagining the physical layout and ambiance of fast-food restaurants (Mahmoud & Ali, 2022). The use of innovative seating arrangements, contemporary decor, and engaging interior designs can help create a unique atmosphere that sets the fast-food restaurant apart from competitors. Additionally, service innovation includes a focus on speed and convenience (Sok &



Kim, 2017). Fast-food restaurants can introduce efficient processes and operations that minimize waiting times and maximize customer satisfaction. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that service innovation, as a service quality dimension, could substantially improve customer patronage of restaurant establishments. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Ning *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service innovation had a significant positive connection with customer patronage intention towards restaurants in Singapore. Ogutu *et al.* (2023), revealed that service innovation had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty intentions in casual dining restaurants in Mombasa. Thus, this study conjectures that,

H<sub>4</sub>: Service innovation has no significant effect on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Quality of Ingredients and Customers' Patronage**

In the fast-food restaurant context, the quality of ingredients refers to the overall characteristics, sourcing, and nutritional value of the ingredients used in the preparation of food. It encompasses factors such as freshness, taste, safety, nutritional content, and sustainability (Yamamoto & Nakamura, 2019). The concept of quality ingredients is becoming increasingly important as consumers seek healthier and more sustainable food options. In this context, freshness plays a significant role in determining ingredient quality. Ideally, high-quality fast-food restaurants prioritize using fresh ingredients that are not overly processed or preserved. Fresh ingredients often have better flavor profiles and retain more of their nutritional value, enhancing the overall dining experience (Müller & Schmidt, 2023). The sourcing of ingredients is another crucial aspect of quality. Restaurants that prioritize quality ingredients often strive to source from trusted suppliers who maintain high standards of production, such as organic or local farms. This approach helps ensure that the ingredients are free from harmful chemicals, hormones, or antibiotics and are produced in an environmentally responsible manner (Schmidt & Wagner, 2018).

Furthermore, Hassan and Ibrahim (2018) asserted that nutritional value is an essential consideration for quality ingredients. Fast-food restaurants that emphasize quality often strive to offer options that are lower in unhealthy fats, sodium, and artificial additives. In addition, Suzuki and Tanaka (2022) opined that by emphasizing the use of high-quality ingredients, fast-food restaurants can improve the overall dining experience for customers, meeting their expectations for healthier, tastier, and more sustainable options. The foregoing viewpoints suggest that quality of ingredients, as a service quality dimension, could improve customer satisfaction and patronage of restaurants. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Mwangi *et al.* (2022), which revealed that quality of ingredients had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. The viewpoint is also backed by the study of Lee *et al.* (2023), which revealed that quality of ingredients had a significant positive influence on customer patronage behavior in family-style restaurants in Malaysia. Thus, the study hypothesizes that,

H<sub>5</sub>: Quality of ingredients has no significant effect on customer patronage of eateries.

## Research Methodology

This study adopted cross sectional survey research design by using a structured questionnaire to obtain data from customers of eatery firms. In applying cross-sectional survey research design, data were obtained from respondents on a one-time basis within a short period of time and with a sample of 379 respondents. Data were analyzed using multiple regression statistical technique. The study adopted convenience sampling technique to include customers of eateries into the survey exercise. In applying this technique, the researcher sought to focus on eatery firms that were conveniently located in areas with huge customer traffic, so that a large number of customers can be surveyed within the shortest possible time period.

This study was based on primary data obtained from customers of eatery firms in Calabar Metropolis with the aid of a structured questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was adapted for the study. The instrument comprised two sections; namely: Section A (respondents' demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, and educational qualifications) and Section B (statements adapted from existing studies to measure the variables of the study). On the questionnaire, the parameters measuring service quality (convenience, customization, staff competence, innovation and quality of ingredients) were adapted from Mwangi *et al.* (2022); Abdullah *et al.* (2023); Lee *et al.* (2023); Ning *et al.* (2022); Ogotu *et al.* (2023). Similarly, the parameters measuring customer patronage (patronage frequency, patronage volume, repeat patronage and referral potential) were adapted from Agwu *et al.* (2021); Olokundun *et al.* (2019); Edna and Wentworth (2007).

The statements (1-4) were designed to measure service convenience; statements (5-8) were designed to measure service customization; statements (9-12) were designed to measure service staff competence; statements (13-16) were designed to measure service innovation; statements (17-20) were designed to measure quality of ingredients, while statements (21-24) were designed to measure customers' patronage. Furthermore, the opinions of respondents were measured on the following 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA = 5 points), Agree (A = 4 points), Undecided (U = 3 points), Disagree (D = 2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1 point).

The instrument of the study was confirmed for reliability through the Cronbach alpha reliability procedure. The questionnaire was hence deemed reliable and adopted for the study, because all its measurement scales generated Cronbach's alpha coefficients from 0.72 to 0.85.

## 4. Result and Discussion of Findings

### 4.3 Test of Hypotheses

Table 1

Model summary of the effect of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.622 <sup>a</sup>	.386	.378	.45801

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service convenience, service customization, service staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients

Table 2

ANOVA<sup>a</sup> of the effect of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.341	5	9.268	44.182	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	73.632	351	.210		
	Total	119.973	356			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer patronage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Service convenience, service customization, service staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients.

Table 3

Coefficients<sup>a</sup> of the effect of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.485	.110		13.480	.000		
	Service convenience	.109	.031	.169	3.508	.001	.754	1.327
	Service customization	.188	.039	.266	4.807	.000	.572	1.747
	Service staff competence	.199	.037	.328	5.342	.000	.463	2.160
	Service innovation	.163	.032	.309	5.021	.000	.463	2.159
	Quality of ingredients	.185	.043	.229	4.286	.000	.611	1.637

a. **Dependent Variable: Customer Patronage**

The results on Tables 1, 2 and 3 demonstrate the effects of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries. The correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.622$ ) in Table 1 reveals that the relationship between service quality delivery and customer patronage of eateries is 62.2 percent. This indicates a very high degree of relationship between the variables in the context of the study. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.386$ ) indicates that service quality delivery accounts for up to 38.6 percent of the variation in customer patronage of eateries. This implies that if other factors remain unchanged, service quality delivery will affect customer patronage of eateries by up to 38.6 percent. Given that  $F = 44.182$  and  $p = 0.000$ , as shown in Table 2, it indicates that the

Effect of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries is statistically significant.

Furthermore, the collinearity statistics presented in Table 30 indicate that the variables were devoid of multi-collinearity because the tolerance values generated exceeded 0.1 and the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) generated were not greater than 5. This entails that the multi-collinearity condition of regression analysis has been met under this circumstance (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). Also, from the standardized coefficients column in Table 3, it has been revealed that with a beta coefficient of 32.8 percent, service staff competence had the highest contribution to the regression model. The second-highest contributor to the model is the service innovation, with a beta coefficient of 30.9 percent. Also, with a beta coefficient of 26.6 percent, service customization had the third-highest contribution to the regression model. The least contributing variable to the model is service convenience; with a beta coefficient of 16.9 percent. This entails that in order of relative importance, service staff competence, service innovation, service customization and quality of ingredients are the most relevant service quality dimensions to customers of eatery firms. In addition, Table 3 also shows that the p-values of all the dimensions tested were less than the error margin of 0.05 with positive t-test values [(service convenience: p-value = 0.001, t = 3.508); (service customization: p-value = 0.000, t = 4.807); (service staff competence: p-value = 0.000, t = 5.342); (service innovation: p-value = 0.000, t = 5.021); (quality of ingredients: p-value = 0.000, t = 4.286)]. This implies that service convenience, customization, competence, innovation and quality of ingredients had significant positive effects on customer patronage of eateries.

### **Discussion of Findings**

From the test of hypothesis one, it was revealed that service convenience has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of eateries. This finding draws support from the study of Abdullah *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service convenience had a significant positive relationship with customer patronage of fast-food restaurants in Amman. The finding is also reinforced by the study of Ogutu *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service convenience had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty intentions in casual dining restaurants in Mombasa. In the context of this study, the implication of this finding is that service convenience, as a service quality dimension, has the proven capacity to significantly improve customers' patronage of eatery firms in Nigeria.

From the test of hypothesis two, it was revealed that service customization has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of eateries. This finding is supported by the study of Mwangi *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service customization had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. Also, the finding is reinforced by the study Lee *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service customization had a significant positive influence on customer patronage behavior in family-style restaurants in Malaysia. The implication of this finding in the

context of this study is that as a service quality dimension, service customization has the proven capacity to significantly improve customers' patronage of eatery firms in Nigeria.

From the test of hypothesis three, it was revealed that service staff competence has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of eateries. This finding draws support from the study of Ning *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service personnel competence had a significant positive connection with customer patronage intention towards restaurants in Singapore. The finding is also corroborated by the study of Mwangi *et al.* (2022), which revealed that staff competence had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. In the context of this study, this finding implies that as a service quality dimension, service staff competence has the proven capacity to significantly improve customers' patronage of eatery firms in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the test of hypothesis four revealed that service innovation has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of eateries. This finding is backed by the study of Ning *et al.* (2022), which revealed that service innovation had a significant positive connection with customer patronage intention towards restaurants in Singapore. The finding is also reinforced by the study of Ogutu *et al.* (2023), which revealed that service innovation had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty intentions in casual dining restaurants in Mombasa. The implication of this finding in the context of this study is that service innovation, as a service quality dimension, has the proven capacity to significantly improve customers' patronage of eatery firms in Nigeria.

Finally, the test of hypothesis five revealed that quality of ingredients has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of eateries. This finding is backed by the study of Mwangi *et al.* (2022), which revealed that quality of ingredients had a significant positive effect on customer patronage in fine-dining establishments in Kenya. The finding is also backed by the study of Lee *et al.* (2023), which revealed that quality of ingredients had a significant positive influence on customer patronage behavior in family-style restaurants in Malaysia. In the context of this study, the implication of this finding is that quality of ingredients, as a service quality dimension, has the proven capacity to significantly improve customers' patronage of eatery firms in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Given the ubiquitous nature of eatery firms, especially in urban cities, the Nigerian fast-food industry has grown to be one of the most competitive service industries in the country, with a projected capacity to expand further in the nearest future. This has spawned intense competition among eatery firms as they strive to grab larger shares of the market. This study was carried out to determine the effect of service quality delivery on customer patronage of eateries in Calabar Metropolis. Its specific aim was to explore the influences of restaurant-centric service quality dimensions including

convenience, customization, staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients on customer patronage of eatery firms.

To that end, the study sought and obtained primary data from customers of selected eatery firms using a structured questionnaire. Through a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics, the data obtained from respondents were analyzed and interpreted. The findings thereof revealed that all the service quality dimensions tested (convenience, customization, staff competence, service innovation and quality of ingredients) had significant positive effects on customer patronage of eatery firms. Specifically, the findings show that in order of relative importance, service staff competence, service innovation, service customization and quality of ingredients are the most relevant service quality dimensions to customers of eatery firms. On the basis of these findings, the study concluded that in the context of eatery firms, service quality delivery plays an indispensable role in enhancing customer patronage in an ever-more competitive sector like the fast-food sector.

### **Recommendations**

1. Managers of eatery firms should commit to making their services more convenient for customers by maintaining multiple ordering/payment options, while delivering customers' orders in time in order to provide remarkable dining experiences to customers.
2. Customization should be prioritized in eateries by ensuring that customers have access to diverse menu options that they can personalize to their tastes while receiving individualized attention from service personnel trained to provide excellent service. By customizing service delivery, customers will feel that they are more in charge of what they consume which will re-assure them of the stability of their health. It will also ensure that customers have memorable, customer-friendly experiences, which can inspire repeat patronage and customer referrals.
3. Managers of eateries should make it a top priority to recruit, train and re-train front-desk customer service personnel to be knowledgeable about their products, and develop interpersonal skills to serve customers with empathy, courtesy and promptness. This will make customers more relaxed and confident that serving personnel serving them are well capable of providing excellent services on a consistent basis.
4. Managers of eateries should consistently incorporate customer-friendly innovative technologies like mobile applications, social media, remote customer-reservation systems, and electronic payment channels into service delivery to ease the process and enable customers enjoy improved service. The introduction of innovation in the service delivery process of eateries will ensure that services become easily accessible, more customizable and more customer-friendly, thereby cutting off delays and human-caused service failures.
5. Managers of eateries should improve the quality of ingredients used in their meals by resorting to more organic items that are fresh, nutritional and devoid

of unwholesome processed additives in order to safeguard customers' health while enabling them enjoy delicious meals. This will provide more confidence to customers that as they consume meals from eateries, their health status will not be jeopardized.

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