

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

Triumph-Aruchi Eteyen Nyong, Philomena Umoren, PhD and Prof.Mbuk Mboho

Department of Mass Communication, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of physical environment on customer buying behaviour of fast food Outlets in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The objectives of the study included; identifying various public relations strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo; examining the influence of physical environment on customer buying behaviour of fast food outlets in Uyo; ascertaining the specific features of physical environment that influence customer purchase-decision; and discovering other factors that influenced customer patronage of fast food outlets in Uyo; The population of the study was 522,398, the study adopted a sample size of 400 based on the Taro Yamene Formula. The survey research method was adopted with the questionnaire as instrument of data collection, while the multistage sampling procedure was used to reach the final respondent. Frequency tables and simple percentages were adopted to analyse the research questions. The study was anchored on the System Theory and Two-Way Symmetric Model. Findings from the study revealed a strong and positive relationship between fast food physical environment and customer buying behaviour of selected outlets. It was revealed that fast food physical environment had a tremendous influence on customer buying behaviour of selected outlets in Uyo. Results from the study discovered that Chicken Republic outlet was the most preferred outlets in Uyo. Findings showed that cleanliness, furniture, and interior décor of the fast food outlets were the specific feature of the fast food physical environment that influenced customers' purchase decision. It was also revealed that Restaurant Image was the other factor that influenced customers' patronage of fast food Outlets. The study concluded that the fast food physical environment was a major factor that influenced customer buying behaviour of selected outlets in Uyo. It was therefore recommended that attention should be given to fast food physical environment with specific features of cleanliness, furniture, and interior décor of the fast food outlets as they were the most influencing features.

Keywords: Public Relations, physical environment, buying behaviour, influence, customer patronage.

Introduction: Public relations has been practiced throughout the ages and under all climes. It has existed for hundreds of years, and has flourished over time. In fact, it is very safe to say that what we now refer to as public relations had actually been with us from the beginning of man's existence. Although the phrase "public relations" was invented in the twentieth century, the practice of public relations had been since the dawn of recorded history. The idea of PR

according to Austin and Pinkleton (2018) stems from the concept of communication, which dates all the way back to the philosophers of Ancient Greece. This idea of using communication to persuade is one of the first practical uses of PR, and it has remained a persuasive tool of communication. And this same idea of using communication to persuade the masses comes from the early 15th century and Pope Gregory XI, who coined the term "propaganda" as it is

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

known today. As decades passed, PR has continued to develop. The industry of PR has evolved, adapting to rapid technological change and the emergence of the internet, and new trends like social media (Alert and Zawawi, 2014).

The contemporary fast food revolution essentially had its origins in the US in the mid 1950's and this style of catering has continued to grow there and to most of the rest of the world (Nnamani, 2017). According to Oxford Business Group (2014), and Ciuci Consulting Report (2015) cited in Agu *et al* (2015), Nigeria's fast food industry experienced rapid growth and development between 1970 and 1980 when the first modern and oldest fast food chain Mr. Biggs, owned by UAC, was founded up to date, followed by other companies such as Kingsway, Leventis, Kas Chicken leading the market. Since the introduction of Mr. Biggs into the fast food industry, consumer acceptance of fast food has continued to increase. These include Tantalizers, Sweet Sensation, Tasty Fried Chicken, Chicken Republic, Mama Cass, Munchies, among others. Some of the fast food chains like Mr. Biggs, Tantalizers and Tasty Fried Chicken are now listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. According to a report by Oxford Business Group (2022) cited in Nnamani (2017), this industry in Nigeria has experienced fast growth and has contributed to the economic development of the country. As at 2022, over 580,000 workers were employed in the fast food industry.

The fast food industry is highly competitive with numerous establishments vying for customer attention and loyalty. In this context, the physical environment of fast food establishments play a critical role in influencing and shaping customer perceptions, and pg. 25business. From the ambiance and décor to the cleanliness and convenience, every aspect of the physical space can impact the customer experience. This study explores various elements of fast food physical environments and examines their impacts on customer satisfaction, behaviour, decision-making and overall patronage as well as delivering services via clean, comfortable and convenient restaurant environments. Through a comprehensive analysis of research findings, and case studies, this paper aims at providing insights

into the importance of creating a conducive and appealing environment to attract and retain customers in the competitive fast food industries.

Statement of the Research Problem

In our society today, the demand for fast food is on the increase. The increase in fast food consumption is attributable to a situation where most consumers are busy working-class people that have little or no time for home cooking. As a result, the need for fast food arises in their daily life. The increase in workload and engagement at work keep them busy at all time at work place which creates less time for them at home to prepare food of their choice. Hence, the need for fast food in every city in Nigeria arises as most individuals engaged in official assignments and duties away from home making the consumption of fast food to become a fact of life.

The use of public relations and physical environment as a tool could play a critical role in assessment of fast food outlets as it is considered to be one of the factors that customers considered before visiting any fast food outlets. Physical environment is one of the most important factors that can lead to increase in customers' patronage with respect to Nigerian settings. In the past and present, customer's patronage has received important attention from marketing scholars and practitioners as a key indicator in the fast food industry.

The recent rise in the operations of fast food outlets gave customers a better opportunity of selections among the outlets, as some of their selections are tied to physical environment of fast food retail outlets. Han and Ryu (2019) stated that an attractive physical environment is an important strategy that had gained growing attention among scholars and fast food owners as it is a key attributes that help to attract customers' patronage fast food retail outlets.

To achieve desired quality in the fast food retail outlets, the use of good and sound raw material is of optimum importance. Fast food meant for consumption must be processed in a hygienic manner, and neat environment. Despite the increasing population of people and number of fast food retail outlets in Uyo, observation has also shown that customers patronise some outlets more than the others. This has led to some of the fast food retail outlets in the area shutting down

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

their businesses and a lot of them complaining of the low patronage of their businesses due to reason that are not well known to them. It is therefore suspected that the problem may be related to physical environment of the fast food retail outlets in the State.

The researcher is worried about the shutting down of some fast food outlets in Uyo, at the same time curious to find out if physical environment of the fast food is a contributory factor to the monumental growth of some outlets. Does the physical environment of fast food outlets in Uyo have a role to play? Does the physical environment of the fast food outlets influence customer buying behaviour? It is in line with this background that this study seeks to unfold the factors that motivate customers to patronise some selected fast food restaurants in Uyo. This study is therefore poised to identify and examine the environmental influence in the patronage of the restaurant. It becomes necessary to know if public relations practices and activities like fast food physical environment create a psychological and emotional influence on consumers of fast food outlets in Uyo, and enhance high patronage of their products.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to: identify various public relations strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo; examine the influence of physical environment on customer buying behaviour of fast food outlets in Uyo; ascertain the specific features of physical environment that influence customer purchase-decision; discover other factors that influenced customer patronage of fast food outlets in Uyo;

Review of Concepts: Public Relations

The concept of public relations has been evolving over time. The term Public Relations has been defined variously by experts and laymen alike from different perspectives. Depending on who is defining it, different aspects may be stressed. Many people, however, agree that public relations involves a wide variety of functions carried out by a communication experts aimed at creating, fostering and maintaining mutual understanding and goodwill between an organisation and its publics. This study considers few definitions out of the numerous existing definitions of public relations.

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

In 2011 and 2012, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) as cited in Okudo, (2017) defined PR as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics". It is essential for businesses to manage the communication flow effectively with the public to avoid perception gap between the organization and the public. Nwosu & Uffoh (2017) provide what they call a working definition.

According to them, Public relations is "essentially about positively and systematically using actions and communications to influence people's attitudes, opinions, belief, interest and behaviour in a given or desired direction (e.g. adopting good environmental behaviours as well as building, lasting, credible reputation for individuals and corporate entities. Public relations, according Mairiga (2017) is concerned with the promotion of goodwill between persons, special publics or the community at large, through the distribution of interpretative materials, the development of neighborly interchange and assessment of public reactions.

The British Institute of Public Relations as contained in Austin & Pinkleon (2018) see Public Relations as "deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between organization and its publics. This definition agrees with the present day perception of the role of Public Relations which emphasises management function aimed at understanding and using Public Relations as a management tool for effective management of men and resources. The reviewed literature suggests that the managerial capabilities associated with public functions are both general and specific. In the opinion of Austin & Pinkleton, (2018) public relation is a planned and sustained programme conducted by organisation's management dealing with the relationship between the organization and its various constituent publics.

Hudson (2015) defines PR practice as the practice of using media channels and other strategies to manage, relate, promote an organisation and cultivate a positive public perception. Johnson & Zawawi (2014) see it as

the process of managing your organisation's brand and communications, especially in times of crisis. Public relation practitioner according to them is a professional that creates, builds, maintains, and sustains a good image, goodwill, understanding, support, good relationships among various groups, organisations and publics.

Physical Environment

The physical environment of a business includes the natural and manufactured elements. These elements have to do with the atmosphere, water, weather, business location, and climate includes business offices, furniture, and office supplies. The physical environment of a restaurant also includes all that your clients see while communicating with your business: Comfort and sitting availability, Cleanliness, Lighting, Ambiance, Kitchen hygiene, Interior decor, Convenience, Physical outlook, Atmospheric quality, Organisation of delivery process among others. It comprises of all the tangible and intangible elements that are located inside and outside a fast food outlet.

The physical environment is an integral part in building competitive advantage for the industry and creating customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants; because they feel the atmosphere around them consciously or unconsciously before, during and after eating food and this will have a major influence in determining total customer satisfaction. Conversely, when consumers are satisfied with the services provided, the result is an interest in behaviour to return to visit and recommend to others (Ali, 2014).

Han & Ryu (2019) asserted that physical environment is a key marketing tool and strategy that helps to differentiate fast food retail outlets from one another, by helping them to establish a distinctive customer experience with a beautiful, pleasant and comfortable atmospheric condition. Therefore, physical environment impact positively on maintaining the old customers, the existing ones, as well as attracting new customers to fast food outlets. Moreover, a well-designed physical environment is considered to be an important element that help in influencing the decision of consumers with respect to pre-purchase, immediate purchase as well as their post-purchase behaviour while evaluating their

satisfaction towards the quality of products and services of a service provider Gitthiri (2017).

Elements of Fast Food Physical Environment:

The following are elements of fast food physical environment as outlined by Han & Ryu (2019).

1. Ambiance and décor: the overall aesthetic and atmosphere of the fast food establishment, including the design, layout, lighting, music, and sounds, colour scheme, temperature and air quality, and furnishings, can significantly impact customer perceptions and willingness to visit.
2. Cleanliness, hygiene and organisation, sitting arrangements: maintaining a clean, well-organised, and visually appealing physical space is essential for creating a positive customer experience and instilling trust in the brand.
3. Accessibility and convenience: ensuring that the restaurant is easily accessible, with ample parking and clear signage, and offering a streamlined ordering and sitting process, can greatly enhance customer satisfaction.

Ambiance and décor:

- i) Inviting atmosphere: the ambiance of a fast food restaurant should create a welcoming and comfortable environment for customers. This can be achieved through thoughtful lighting, warm colour schemes, and the strategic placement of furniture and décor.
- ii) Branding and consistency: the décor and overall aesthetic should align with the brand identity, creating a cohesive and recognizable experience for customer across locations.
- iii) Mood and emotions: the physical environment should evoke positive emotions and feelings, such as excitement, a sense of community, to encourage customers to linger and enjoy their dining experience.

Cleanliness and organization:

- i) Immaculate cleanliness: customers expect a fast food restaurant to be spotlessly clean, from the floors and

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

- the tables to the rest rooms and the kitchen areas. This reflects the brand's commitment to quality and attention to detail.
- ii) Organized layout: a well-designed and organized physical space, with clear signage can enhance the customer's experience and reduce frustration.
 - iii) Attention to detail: small touches, such as maintaining the appearance of the exterior, can convey a sense of pride and professionalism, further reinforcing the brand's commitment to excellence.

Accessibility and convenience

- i) Convenient location: the fast food restaurant should be strategically located, with easy access and ample parking, to cater on the go customer.
- ii) Streamlined ordering: a user friendly orderly process, whether through a cashier, kiosk or mobile app, can significantly enhance the customer's experience and encourage repeat visit.
- iii) Comfortable sitting: providing comfortable and ample sitting options both indoors and outdoors can allow customers to linger and enjoy their meal in a relax environment.

Consumer Buying Behaviour: The concept of consumer buying behaviour involves the study of individuals and the method they employ to choose, utilise, and set out products and services to fulfill their wants, and the effects that these method have on the consumer and the society as a whole. It refers to all the thoughts, feelings, and actions that an individual has or takes before or while buying any products, services or idea, as a result, the outcome of buying behaviour is buying decision (Dzisah & Ocloo, 2018). Consumer behaviour involves much more than understanding what products a consumer buys. It embraces factors, which can affect the decision-making process as a person works through the purchase decision.

According to Kotler (2019), consumer behaviour occurs when consumers are stimulated

by external factors and come to a purchasing decision based on their personal characteristics and also on decision-making process. These factors included choosing a product, brand, a retailer, timing, and quantity. Consumers purchasing intentions always arise after consumer perceived value and perceived benefit, that is to say, comes from consumers perception on benefits and values acquisition, and it is an important key to predict consumers purchasing behaviour. Purchasing behaviour can measure the possibility of a consumer to buy a product, and the higher it is, the higher a consumer's willingness to buy a product is (Dzisah & Ocloo, 2018).. People comparatively purchase those products which they are familiar with and also those products with good brand image, because a good brand image can make you feel at ease and reliable. They concluded that the higher consumers' familiarity degree with the product is, the better is the confidence and attitude to the products and thus the purchasing decision will be higher.

Theoretical Framework: System Theory: The system theory was propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1976. The theory stipulates that development and continued existence of a business is reliant on the customers. And that a better understanding of the customers and how they can be served better will help in the understanding of the social responsibility of business to its customers. According to him, a company is a system, and a system is seen as a place of mutually dependent fractions which collectively craft the entire business. Every divisions or fractions have a say and in return gets something from the whole which in turn is inter-reliant on the environment. A system may be closed or open. A system is said to be closed when it does not receive inputs from outside, that is to its peripheral environment does not add yields to the outer environment.

In relation to this study, a system can be said to be an open system when it exchanges inputs and outputs with its environment. It gives output to the environment and in return receives inputs from the environment. The case study which is fast food restaurant is an example of an open system as it receives inputs and gives outputs to the environment. Its survival is

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

dependent upon a series of exchange and the continual interaction with the environment gives rise to a number of broader responsibilities to society in general.

Two-way Symmetric Model : The two-way Symmetric Model of Public Relations was propounded by James Grunig and Hunt in 1984. It focuses primarily in making sure that decisions made by organisations are mutually beneficial between itself and its audiences. Grunig's two-way symmetric model provides for the sole question of this study that organisations should bargain and or negotiate issues alongside customers who form an important part of the organisations environment. That is to say organisations especially those running open systems like fast food should relate and create quality service and relationship with its customers to help create a favourable image for it. This will foster a sense of belonging for the customers of the organisation and therefore create a platform for dialogue between the organisation and the customers. It will also build an acceptable image for the organisation and therefore a favourable corporate image which will stimulate buying behaviour, patronage and eventually loyalty.

In relation to this study, it advocates that service quality in a fast food outlet can retain customers and achieve patronage, loyalty and profitability by building reciprocal relationships founded on safeguarding and affirming customer service, fairness and self-esteem. It requires that companies view customers as people first and consumers second. A progressive business organisation is on familiar terms with the fact that it is in its own interest to be socially responsible, since an enhanced public image is more likely to be attractive to investors – employees, customers, consumers, suppliers and most community and government.

Research Design: The survey research design was adopted for this study with the questionnaire as a data collection instrument. This design was employed to capture accurate assessment of public relations and the influence of physical environment on customer buying behaviour of

fast food outlets in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The survey is a vital research method for collecting valuable data from a population too large to be observed directly. It does not only gather, analyse and present data, it goes further to interpret the data, synthesise and integrate them with other variables in order to unravel the relationship between the data and the variables (Senam and Akpan, 2014). Thus, usually the researcher is compelled to draw a representative sample of the population in order to draw inferences.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised all the residents of Uyo metropolis. The population was based on the 2006 National Population Census (NPC, 2006) projected to 2022 at the rate of 3.4%. The projected population of Uyo as of 2022 stood at 522,398. This figure constituted the population of this study. The population consists of customers that patronise Chicken Republic outlets in Uyo city, capital of Akwa Ibom State, South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures: The sample size for the study was 400. This sample size was statistically determined using the Taro Yamene Formula. This formula was used for determining sample size at 0.05 level of tolerable error for a finite population of Uyo residents estimated at 522,398. For equal representation and generalization, the multi-stage sampling procedure was employed; the researcher made use of two sampling procedures at different stages. In the first stage, the cluster was used; Uyo metropolis was divided into six (6) clusters, with each cluster representing each of the selected fast food outlets in Uyo metropolis. In the last stage, the purposive sampling procedure was adopted on the ground that respondents must be customers of selected fast food outlets and must be found in the restaurant. Therefore, individual respondents were selected purposively. The three hundred and eighty four (384) sample population was divided by the selected fast food outlets located in Uyo. An estimated number of 132 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each of the three (3) selected fast food outlets in Uyo as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Fast Food Outlets and Branches

Outlets	Branches
Klimanjaro Foods	Oron Road
	Ikot Ekpene Road
Chicken Republic	UniUyo Roundabout
	Abak Road
Crunchies Foods	Oron Road
	Aka Road

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution to Selected Fast Food Outlets in Uyo

S/No.	Outlets	Subjects	Percentage (%)
1.	Crunchies	132	33.3
2.	Chicken Republic	132	33.3
3.	Kilimanjaro	132	33.3
Total	3	396	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Description of the Research Instrument: The questionnaire was the measuring instrument to gather the primary data for the study. The questionnaire was made up of thirteen (13) structured questions with maximum of 5 options framed to supply information on the variables under consideration. The questionnaire consists of two (2) sections (A) and (B). Section A (questions 1-4) will focus on essential demographic information about the respondents, such as age, gender, marital status, educational level among others. Section B will assess the influence of public relations on customer patronage of fast food restaurant in Uyo. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling procedure. Questions 5 took care of objective 1, questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 addressed objective 2, question 10 took care of objective 3, while question 11 addressed objective 4. A maximum of six (5) options were provided while individual respondents were given the options. An introductory note assuring respondents of the confidentiality of their personal details and

responses was attached to appropriately answer the research questions confidently.

Method of Data Collection: The researcher with the aid of two research assistants issued a total of 400 copies of questionnaire to the respondents (customers of selected fast food outlets) in Uyo Metropolis. The instrument was administered on 400 respondents purposively from the three (3) fast food outlets in Uyo metropolis. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered on respondents, 386 copies were returned and considered useful for the study.

Method of Data Analysis: The data that were generated from the use of structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics such as: simple percentages and frequency distribution. The highest percentage (%) in each question was considered as representing the views of the majority of the respondents. this allows for the results to be presented in easy-to-read tables and explanations were given on responses.

The formula for the simple percentage is:

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{x \times 100}{N}$$

N = Total response

Data Presentation and Analysis

Where X = Individual stem in the group of response

Table 5: PR Strategies used in Selected Fast Food Outlets in Uyo

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Service Quality	102	26
Food Quality	100	25
Atmospheric Quality	101	25
Personalised discount	3	1
Price fairness	90	23
Total	396	100

Source: Field data 2024

The data shown in Table 5 displayed different kinds of PR strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo metropolis. The data revealed that 102 (26%) of the respondents opted for service quality as the PR strategy used in fast food restaurants in Uyo. While 101 (25%), 100 (25%) and 90 (23%) of them opted for food quality,

atmospheric quality and price fairness as PR strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo. This suggests that service quality, food quality, atmospheric quality and price fairness are the most frequently used PR strategy in selected fast food outlets in Uyo.

Table 6: Responses on whether Respondents were attracted by fast food physical

Environment to visit selected outlets in Uyo

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agreed	114	29
Strongly Agreed	277	70
Disagreed	5	1
Strongly Disagreed	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Total	396	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 6 reveal that 277 (70%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they were attracted by the fast food physical environment to visit selected outlets in Uyo. This

shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondent got attracted by fast food physical environment to visit their preferred outlets in Uyo.

Table 7: Responses on whether Respondents were influenced by fast food physical

Environment to patronise food items

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agreed	130	33
Strongly Agreed	264	67
Disagreed	2	1
Strongly Disagreed	-	-
Undecided	-	-

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

Total 396 100
 Source: Field data 2024

Table 7 revealed that an overwhelming majority 264 (67%) of the respondents ‘strongly agreed’ while 139 (33%) of them ‘agreed’ that they were influenced by the physical environment of the

fast food outlet to patronise their preferred outlets in Uyo. This shows that the physical environment of a fast food outlet has an influenced on customer buying behaviour.

Table 8: Respondents’ Favourite fast food outlet in Uyo

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Crunchies Foods	124	31
Chicken Republic	187	47
Kilimanjaro Foods	85	22
Total	396	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 8 showcased the three (3) selected outlets in Uyo metropolis. The data reveal that 187 (47%) of the respondents opted for Chicken Republic as their most preferred brand of fast

food in Uyo, followed by Crunchies Food with 124 (31%). This suggests that Chicken Republic and Crunchies Foods were the most preferred brands of fast food outlets in Uyo metropolis.

Table 9: 5- Point Likert Scale Rating of fast food physical environment

Options (Likert 5- Scale)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Excellent (5)	196	49
Very Good (4)	145	37
Good (3)	55	14
Fair (2)	-	-
Poor (1)	-	-
Total	396	100

Source: Field data 2024

The data shown in Table 9 displayed a 5-Point Likert Scale rating of the physical environment of fast food outlets in Uyo, the result revealed that 196 (49%) of the respondents rated the physical

environment of their preferred fast food outlets as “Excellent”. This shows that consumers were satisfied with the physical environment of fast food outlets in Uyo.

Table 10: Specific feature of fast food physical environment that influenced Respondents’ purchase decision

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Cleanliness, furniture and interior décor	188	47
Ambiance, table arrangements and overall hygiene	91	23
Accessibility, convenience, & comfortable sitting spaces	22	6
Lighting, music and sound	43	11
Exterior layout, ample parking space & clear signage	52	13

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

Total	396	100
--------------	------------	------------

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data displayed in Table 10 show that 188 (47%) of the respondents said that the specific feature of the fast food physical environment that

influenced their buying behaviour was the Cleanliness, furniture and interior décor in their preferred fast food outlet.

Table 11: Other Factors that Influenced Customer Patronage of Fast Food Outlets

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Social Media Visibility	38	10
Referrals	99	25
Restaurant Image	154	39
Advertising	72	18
Sales Promotions	33	8
Total	396	100

Source: Field data 2024

The data shown in Table 11 displayed other factors that contributed to customer patronage of fast food outlets in Uyo. The data indicated that 154 (39%) of the respondents reveal that

Restaurant Image was the other factor that influenced their patronage. This shows that the Image of the fast food outlet has a crucial role to play in the purchase decision of customers.

Discussion of Findings: RQ 1: What are the various public relations strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo

This question is aimed at identifying some public relations strategies used in fast food industries. The answer to this question is found in Table 5. The data shown in Table 3 displayed different kinds of PR strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo metropolis. It revealed that 102 (26%) of the respondents opted for service quality as the PR strategy used in fast food restaurants in Uyo. While 101 (25%), 100 (25%) and 90 (23%) of them opted for food quality, atmospheric quality and price fairness as PR strategies used in fast food outlets in Uyo. This suggests that service quality, food quality, atmospheric quality and price fairness are the most frequently used PR strategy in fast food outlets in Uyo.

from organisation-centric to customer-centric. Organisation tends to do their best in order to gain patronage and revisit from customers, because they are getting wiser by the day as they choose to spend their money where they will get a good run for it.

Supporting this finding, Kalu (2015) points that interaction with the service employees is the most important influence on customer service quality assessment and overall service satisfaction. He suggests that the behavior of service employees, when serving the needs and wishes of existing customers create impression which either increases customer satisfaction or subsequent continuous patronage or cause dissatisfaction and less patronage.

In summing up the import of the data in Table 5, it can be inferred that service quality is the most common form of PR practices in fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt and Uyo metropolis; this may be because in recent times, customers pay more attention to the kind of services they receive especially from employees. It could also be because marketing has shifted

RQ 2: To what extent does the physical environment influence customer buying behaviour of fast food outlets in Uyo?

This question is aimed at examining the influence of fast food physical environment on customer buying behaviour of selected outlets in Uyo. The answer to this question is found in Table 6, .7, 8, and 9. Table 6 indicates that 277

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

(70%) of the respondents 'strongly agreed' that they were attracted by the physical environment of fast food outlets. Table 7 revealed that 264 (67%) of them 'strongly agreed' that they were influenced by the physical environment outlook to patronise fast food outlets in Uyo. Table 8 revealed that 187 (47%) of them said that Chicken Republic outlet was the most preferred outlet with an attractive physical environment. While Table 9 show a 5- point Likert Scale rating, as 196 (49%) of the respondents rated their preferred fast food physical environment as 'Excellent'

This finding conforms to the findings of Ali (2014), and Centinsoz (2019) which stated that the most important elements of achieving success in the fast food retail outlets in terms of customers patronage is the physical environment, the study therefore stated that any pleasant and innovative environment attracts customers' patronage in fast food retail outlets.

More so, Gitthiri (2017) and Han & Ryu (2019) found that customers at all-time sense the physical environment consciously (or unconsciously) before, during and after the meal when running out in a fast food retail outlets, therefore, they stated that restaurants food must be in acceptable quality, pleasing physical environment which will help the fast food retail outlets to increase customers patronage.

Similarly, the findings of Choi *et al* (2022) revealed that the physical environment has a positive and significant effect on consumer satisfaction. In addition, research conducted by Çetinsöz (2019) proves that the physical environment has a positive and significant effect on consumer patronage.

In summing up the import of these findings, it is vital to note that in the highly competitive fast food industry, when convenience and customer satisfaction are paramount, the physical environment has become key differentiator. A well designed and well maintained physical space cannot only attract customers but also foster loyalty and repeat business from existing ones. In the same vein, the physical environment has a strong positive significance impact on customers' patronage.

RQ 3: What are the specific features of fast food physical environment that influenced

Public Relations: Fast Food Physical Environment and Customer Buying Behaviour of Selected Outlets in Uyo

customer purchase-decision?

The answer to this question is jointly found in Table 10. The data presented in Table 10 reveal that 188 (47%) of the respondents said that the specific feature of the fast food physical environment that influenced their buying behaviour was the Cleanliness, furniture and interior décor in their preferred fast food outlet. This indicates that the physical environment of a fast food restaurant has a major influence on the customer experience. From the moment a customer walks in the door, they are forming an expression of the restaurant based on its layout, design, cleanliness and overall atmosphere.

This implies that the physical environment affects our mood, and our mood affects our buying behaviour and purchasing decision. Fast food physical surroundings have a significant and positive impact on their psychology, thereby, influencing their patronage. The environments we live in have a significant impact on our mental health, affecting everything from stress levels and social interactions to emotions and cognitive function.

Dincer & Ozdemir (2018) found that the three major attributes of physical environment which are ambient conditions, spatial layout, symbols and artifacts positively impacted positively on customers patronage of fast food retail outlets.

In contrast, the finding of Han & Ryu (2019) asserted that the three major dimensions of physical environment that influence customer satisfaction and patronage in a fast food retail outlet are ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, signs, symbols and artifacts. Basera *et al* (2023) confirmed that physical environment has a direct linkage to customer satisfaction and patronage in fast food retail outlets.

RQ 4: What are the other factors that influenced customer patronage of Fast Food outlets in Uyo?

This question was aimed at identifying other factors that influenced customer patronage of fast food outlets in Uyo. The answer to this question is found in the data shown in Table 11; it displayed other factors that contributed to customer patronage of fast food outlets in Uyo.

The data indicated that 154 (39%) of the respondents reveal that Restaurant Image was the other factor that influenced their patronage. This shows that the way and manner people view a restaurant, what people say about it, and what it represents have a role to play in the purchase decision of customers.

Furthermore, Kotler (2019) believe that a favourable corporate image can boost sales, through increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. They noted that company name, logo, price charged for services, level and quality of advertising placed in the media are some identifiable key elements of corporate identity that can influence the customer's perception of company's image. Inclusive is reputation which is the consistency of an organisation's actions over time created through the guarantee of reliable service at zero defects tolerance. They posit that reliability is very important to customers when they evaluate the quality of services offered.

In the same vein, the study of Agu et al (2017) on fast food restaurant image and customer loyalty revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that fast food restaurant image influenced their purchase decision and loyalty to their brands. This suggests that owners of fast food outlets should strive to improve and review their brand image and reputation, to give maximum satisfaction to their consumer in order to get their constant patronage and loyalty.

Conclusions

Conclusively, public relations activities (physical environment) in fast food outlets as we have seen in this study have a significant influence on customer buying behaviour and patronage. This research inferred that fast food physical environment is able to create psychological influence and satisfaction on customers. Thus, fast food physical environment has become a vital instrument to attract, create, sustain customer patronage; at the same time a huge market shares in a competitive market. The physical outlook of a fast food restaurant has a role to play in the mind of customers and consumers of fast foods.

The physical environment of fast food establishments is a crucial determinant of

customer patronage. By investing in creating a clean, comfortable, and welcoming atmosphere, fast food chains can enhance customer satisfaction, foster loyalty and ultimately drive business success in a competitive market. This study has provided insights into the various elements of fast food physical environment and their impact on customer behaviour, along with strategies for enhancing these environments to attract and retain customers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: Fast food retail outlets should focus more on physical environment as it will help to increase the patronage of customers in their outlets and also keep their values in the short and long run; Fast food managers should help in effective planning, construct, improve and observe physical environment in order to develop higher degree of customers' patronage; Fast food owners and managers (PR) should strive to strategically locate their firms in areas where customers will perceive as convenient by the outer and interior nature of the environment.; Atmospheric quality of the fast food restaurant should be considered by fast food outlets' operators before setting up fast food restaurant. This is important if they want to stay longer in business and increase their patronage; and Special attention should be given to lighting, cleanliness, temperature, decorations and sitting comfort in the restaurant

References

- Agu, G. A., Madumere, H. I., Etuk, S. and Kalu, I. N. (2015) Rating of Factors Influencing Subscribers' Loyalty to GSM Network Providers in South East Nigeria. *Journal of Business and Value Creation*, Vol. 4. No. 2.
- Alert, J. & Zawawi, C. (2014). *Strategy Planning and Scheduling*. In Johnston, J. & Zawawi, C. (Eds). *Public Relations: Theory and Practice*. Crows Nes: Allen and Unwin.
- Ali, F. (2014). The Influence of Physical Environment On Emotions, Customer Satisfaction And Behavioural Intentions In Chinese Resort Hotel Industry. *Journal for Global Business Advancement*, 7(3), 249–266.

- Austin, E.W, & Pinkleton, B.E. (2018). *Strategic Public Relations Management: Planning and Managing Effective Communication Programme*. 2nd Ed, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum associates, Inc.
- Basera, C.H, Mutsikwa, M., & Dhliwayo, K. (2023). A comparative study of the impact of ambient factors on customers' patronage in fast food retail outlets in Zimbabwe. *Journals of Arts, Science and Commerce*, 4(1), 24- 34.
- Çetinsöz, B. C. (2019). Influence of Physical Environment on Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in Upscale Restaurants. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 7(2), 700–716.
- Choi, W. S., Heo, J. S., & Kim, M. J. (2022). Effects of physical environment on brand loyalty and moderated effects of brand image. *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research*, 56(12), 57-61.
- Dinçer, M. Z., & Özdemir Güzel, S. (2018). The Effect of Restaurant s Physical Environment on Perceived Value, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty: Case of Istanbul. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 6(4), 626–643.
- Dzisah, W. E. & Ocloo, C.E. (2018). Celebrity endorsement and consumer buying behaviour: Enhancing the promotion function of marketing in the central business area of Accra, Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 2 (5) 42-56.
- Esangbedo, R (2021) *the impact of celebrity endorsements on the buying behaviour of Rowan university students age 18-24*. M.A Dissertation. Rowan University, May 20, 2021.
- Gitthiri, M.N. (2017). Influence of physical environment on customers' patronage and satisfaction in Kenya rated restaurants. *Asian journal of social sciences*, 2(1), 11-19
- Han, H., & Ryu K. (2019). The roles of the physical environment, price perception, and customer satisfaction in determining customer loyalty in the restaurant industry. *Journal of Hospitality Tourism, 33(4)*, 487-510.
- Hudson, M. (2015) *'Tactics' In Johnston, J. & Zawawi, C. (Ed).Public Relations Theory and Practice*. Crow's Nest: Allen and Unwin.
- Johnson, J. & Zawawi, C. (2014). *What is Public Relations? Public Relations Theory and Practice*; Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.
- Kalu, I. N. (2015) *Service Quality and Marketing Performance of Hotels in Abia and Imo States*. A Ph.D. Thesis: Department of Marketing, Abia State University, Uturu.
- Kotler, P. (2019). *Principles of Marketing*. 4th Ed. HP Press. New Delhi.
- Mairiga, A. K. (2017). *Public relations as an effective promotional tool in marketing of services: A case study of Keffi Community Bank Nig. LTD*, MBA Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Nnamani, S. N. (2017). *The impact of public relations on customers' patronage of new generation Bank in Nigeria: A study of selected commercial banks*, MBA Project, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Nwosu, I.E. & Uffoh, O. (2017). *Environmental Public Relations Management: Principle, Strategies, Issues and cases*; Enugu: IDS
- Okudo, B (2017). Impact of Public Relations on a Corporate Organisation: A study of First Bank of Nigeria PLC Enugu. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences*. 4 (10), 98-110.
- Senam, N and Akpan, U (2014). The Survey Communication Research. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2 (19) 461-478.
- Siswanto, B, Rahmawati, t, & Kuleh, J. (2022). The Influence of Food Quality and Physical Environment on Behavior Intention through Customer Satisfaction at Visitors to Mcdonald's Store In Samarinda. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)* 11 (12) 79-99

