



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Assessing the relationship between customer experience and customer patronage mediated by servicescape and perceived quality in Nigerian food restaurants

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to assess how servicescape affect consumer perceptions of service quality, customer experience, and patronage at local restaurants in the South-West and South-South areas of Nigeria. Servicescape interventions were implemented at selected local restaurants, with the impact of these servicescape interventions to be compared between the two regions. Research was carried out at four major urban areas: Ado-Ekiti (and Osogbo) for South-West Nigeria; and Asaba (and Benin City) for South-South Nigeria. This study used a concurrent embedded mixed-method design to gain a comprehensive understanding of phenomena by incorporating quantitative designs with qualitative designs. The quantitative segment of this study used a quasi-experimental comparison group pretest post-test design to evaluate how changes within the servicescape affect customer satisfaction levels, while the qualitative segment of this study used semi-structured interviews to provide greater understanding of the perceptions and experiences of customers who patronized a selected sample of restaurants. A convenience sample of 436 participants using adhoc method was drawn from an indefinite population of restaurant customers. Pearson Product Moment Correlation were employed to test the hypothesis. Findings suggest a significant relationship exists between the servicescape and customer experience and patronage of food restaurants. Furthermore, all locations showed a significant effect size. Food quality and service quality also had a positive effect on customer experience and patronage, although food quality's beta coefficient was higher than that of service quality at all study locations. Finally, customer experience was found to have a significant and positive relationship with customer patronage. The research study concluded that servicescape dimensions, including but not limited to, aesthetics of the facility, overall ambience, table settings, layout, service staff and cleanliness are essential in determining how customers experience can be improved in food restaurants.

Keywords: Servicescape; Perceived quality; Customer experience; Customer patronage

1. Introduction

Fast foods outlets can be classified as either unstandardized or standardized services (Mustapha, Fakokunde, & Awolusi, 2014). The unstandardized outlets are normally the unregistered small operators, which provide informal but quick casual services to their customers. Local food retail outlets, casual dining restaurants and similar ones are in this group (Mustapha, et al., 2014). Donko, Kayang, Quage, and Akyet in Akintaro (2012) stated that in several third world

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countries, Nigeria inclusive, street food vendors are significant parts of the food supply chain; street food satisfies a crucial need of those in cities in that, it is available on demand, and some parts of the population depend on it entirely. Onyeneho and Hedberg (2013) described that several of these food vendors move from one place to the other using different means such as carts, wheelbarrows and specially designed bicycles to sell their food and sometimes, they are found under shades of trees where they attend to their customers.

With increased education, leading to stronger purchasing power and a higher standard of living nowadays, Nigeria provides a notable number of sophisticated customers who are eager to modernize their eating habit and lifestyle (Lia, 2009). As the food service industry is becoming competitive, entrepreneurs are forced to improve the value-added benefits to maintain competitive advantage (Lia, 2009). The key to sustainable competitive advantage according to Shemwell, Yavas and Bilgin (1998) is in delivering quality and favourable service experience to their customers by the service providers. In a bid by the service providers to rival one another, the physical environment has become a vital point in meeting customers' expectations and delight (Hightower, Brady, & Baker, 2002; Lia, 2009; Cicenaitė & Maciejewska, 2012).

The physical environment where services are delivered, otherwise known as 'servicescape', has been the focus of attention in the service marketing literature in recent times (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Reimer & Kuehn, 2005; Ezeh & Harris, 2007; Berglund & Halvarsson, 2008; Lia, 2009; Cicenaitė & Maciejewska, 2012; Ferrera, 2015). Bitner (1992) advanced the concept of servicescape to refer to the environment in which services are delivered. General elements of the physical evidence consist of the firm's physical structure and other tangible features (Cicenaitė & Maciejewska, 2012). The servicescape elements that influence customers comprise facility extensor design (such as signage, parking, surrounding environment, landscape) and facility interior design (e.g. office layout, equipment, music, scent, lighting, temperature, air-ventilation) (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2009); as well as service contact personnel (Hoffman & Turley, 2002).

Physical environment would appear to be a significant element of service interactions in that it has an impact on customers' attitude and behaviours beyond their perceptions of both the core product and service (Greenwell, Fink & Pastore, 2002). In the view of Zeithaml et al. (2009), the servicescape has an impact on the experience of customers. Namasiyavan and Mattila (2007) revealed significant effect of servicescape on customers' affective responses before a service delivery. Bitner (in Simpeh, Simpeh, Abdul-Nasiru, & Amponsat-Tawiah, 2011) stated that service settings play the significant role in influencing expectations, differentiation of service firms, expediting customer and employee goals and affecting the nature of customer experiences. According to Anand (in Simpeh et al., 2011), the servicescape refers to the external appearance of the service outfit and hence, can be vital in forming early impression and setting up customer expectations. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) submitted that customers look for proof of the value or quality of the intangible service from perceiving the tangible elements, which is the servicescape. Beyond the provision of service quality in an environment that is inviting, there is a need to ascertain the customers' interpretation of their experiences with the product that can influence patronage behaviour (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). Besides, no studies have identified servicescape dimensions that are specific to food restaurants in Southwest and Southsouth Nigeria that can influence customer experience and patronage; hence the need to expand and enrich the servicescape concept as it applies to food restaurant setting in developing countries like Nigeria.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptual Literature

2.1.1. Servicescape

Kotler (in Kearney et al., 2007) referred to the physical attributes of the service provider's external environment as atmospherics: It was the term used for the intentional control and changing of environmental cues in the service environment. According to DiPietro and Campbell (2014), the origin of studying the atmosphere and the environment as a marketing tool can be specifically traced back to the field of retailing. DiPietro and Campbell (2014) asserted that Kotler was probably the first to diagnose that when making a purchase decision, consumers consider other things apart from what a product or service offers; that is, they factor in the product as a whole as well as other attributes such as packaging, advertising, imagery and other components that coincide with the product's positioning. Atmospherics is sensory in nature; that is, one's surrounding physical environment, is experienced through the senses. The major sensory channels are seeing (colour, shapes, design and brightness); hearing (sound, volume, pitch); smelling (scent and freshness); and feeling (temperature, texture) (Namasivayam & Lin, 2004, 2008; Raab, Zemke, Hertzman, & Singh, 2013; DiPietro & Campbell, 2014; Adiele & Nweke, 2015; Simpeh et al., 2011).

2.1.2. *Serviscape in Dining/Restaurant Environment (DINESCAPE)*

DINESCAPE refers to dining atmospherics (Petzer & Mackay, 2014; Heung & Gu, 2012), restaurant's physical environment (Ryu & Jang, 2008; Kucukergin & Dedeoglu, 2015; Tuzunkan & Albayrak, 2016). A restaurant's physical surroundings is the first element to be observed on entering a restaurant and customers wish to eat out at a restaurant not for nutritional purposes; but also to form an unforgettable experience, to be in company with family and friends and get away from hitches and the routine of life (Tuzunkan & Albayrak, 2016). The physical surroundings of a restaurant form the customer's first impression towards the restaurant and dining intention (Li, 2012). Kotler (in Ryu & Jang, 2008) stated that consumers might react to more than just the tangible meal served or the service rendered (promptness) when making a purchase decision. Indeed, the place and more specifically, the atmosphere of the place (when the product or service is purchased or consumed) may be one of the most influential factors in purchase or re-purchase decision-making. The atmosphere is the design of a buying environment, which is meant to create specific emotional states in the consumer and enhance his/her purchase intention (Ryu & Jang, 2008; Heung & Gu, 2012).

The physical environment is a significant determinant of consumer's psychology and behaviour when services consumed primarily for hedonic (enjoyment) purposes and also when customers spend relatively long periods of time immersed in a particular environment (Ryu & Jang, 2008; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994; Bitner, 1992; Tuzunkan & Albayrak, 2016). Atmospherics is described as the quality of the surrounding space (Khalifa, 2015). Kotler (in Khalifa, 2015) emphasized that the atmosphere engenders an image of the surrounding space in customers' minds and the customers' perceived values of the space varies their buying behaviour. The atmosphere of the restaurant consists of seat arrangement, decoration, music and hygiene which are the major elements that create and build the positive image in the first sight of customers and form unforgettable memories in the minds of customers (Lim, 2010, Phan & Nguyen, 2016). Elements of the physical environment include appealing interior design and décor, lighting, colour, high quality furniture, comfortable seats, pleasant music, professional appearance of employees, etc. (Li, 2012).

2.1.3. *Customer Experience*

Competition in today's global market is becoming increasingly fiercer (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Petermans, van Cleempoel, Nuyts, & Vanrie, 2009). Customers today perceive products and services as the same; thereby challenging retailer, manufacturers and service providers to seek for cues that differentiate their offerings (Petermans et al., 2009). One way of differentiating one's product or service offering is to create memorable customer experience (Verheof, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, & Schlesinger, 2009). Companies are increasingly using the framework of customer experience to define what they offer to their customers. Gupta and Vajic (2000) explained that an experience occurs when a customer has any sensation, knowledge, or acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by the service provider. Harris, Harris and Baron (2003) stated that total customer's experience emphasizes the importance of all contacts that a customer has with an organisation and the customer's holistic experience. Directing the store's retail design towards the creation of memorable customer experiences by appealing to their senses, emotions and values can contribute to the creation of such company-client relationships. A retail experience, which succeeds in delivering value to the customer, can become the key to long term retailer success (Petermans et al., 2009).

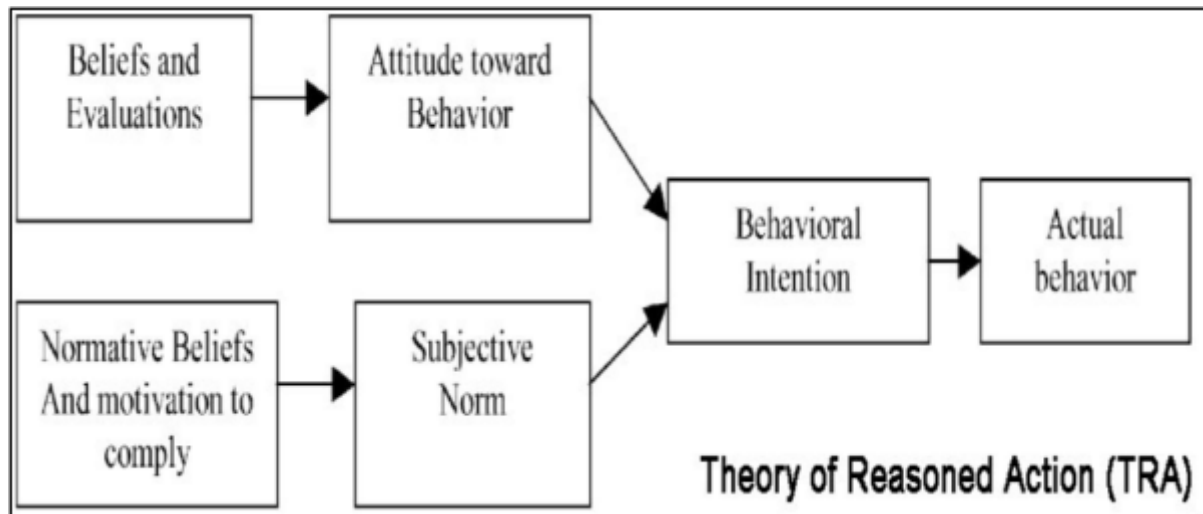
Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) formulated the concept of customer experience as a new experiential approach to consumer behaviour. Until then, the customer was a rational decision taker who tries to purchase the best product from an available selection of products at a reasonable price (Fiore & Kim, 2007; Petermans et al., 2009). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) however, stated that in contrast to this rational and utilitarian approach, some consumption activities are better explained by an experiential approach. A customer's interaction with the product or service (experience) can be intrinsically satisfying without thinking about a product or service's utilitarian property (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Solomon in Koci and Sidark (2014) submitted that servicescape acts as a whole package for customer experience, providing a total image, and portraying the potential usage and quality of service.

2.2. **Related Theoretical Review**

2.2.1. *Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)*

Fishbein (1963) proposed a model of attitude formation called the 'Fishbein model'; the first of a breed of 'expectancy value' models (Fishbein 1963, Fishbein 1965). The Fishbein model suggested that a person's overall attitude towards an object derives from his beliefs and feelings about different features of the object (Ahtola, 1975). The model was extended later on not only to evaluate attitudes formation, but behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This extended model is known as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) shown in Figure 1. According to this model, behaviour is approximately equal to behavioural intention, which is derived from a combination of the consumer's attitude toward purchasing the product and the subjective norms about the behaviour. In addition, a notable change in the Theory of

Reasoned Action approach is that attitude toward the behaviour (the act of buying) is evaluated rather than simply the attitude toward the object. This means that, as behaviour is being measured, a consumer may have a very favourable attitude toward a product, but not toward the act of buying it. In this study, patronage behaviour is measured by behavioural intention, which is influenced by customers' perception and attitude towards the restaurant environment and perceived quality experienced in the service environment. Subjective norms can be represented by interactions with the restaurant staff and other customers when they visit; and the extent to which other customers influence them to patronize the food restaurant.



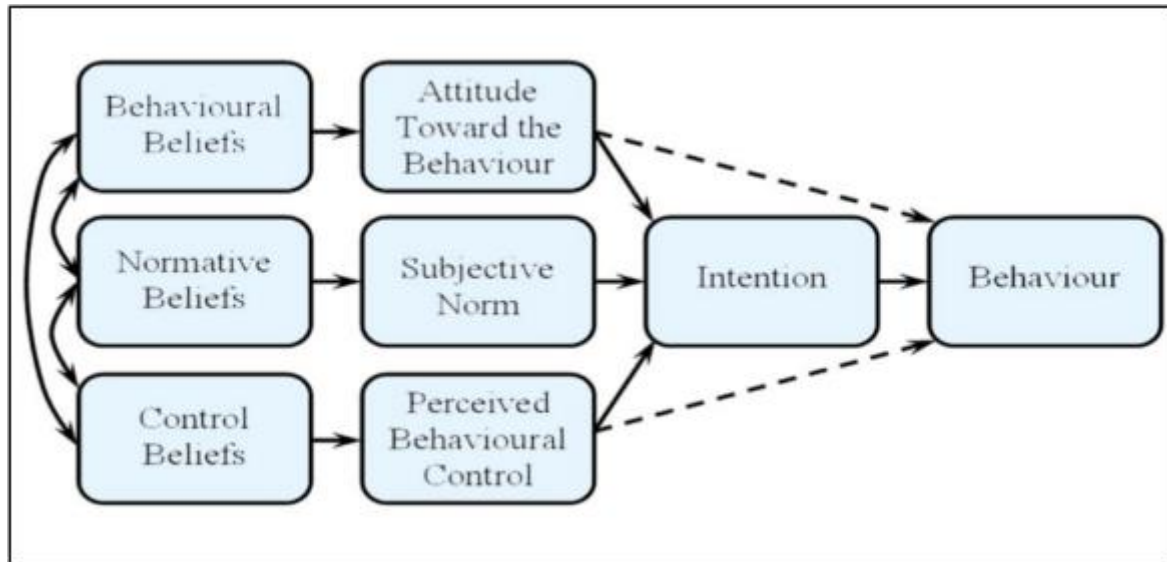
Source: Siragusa and Dixon (2009)

Figure 1 Model of Theory of Reasoned Action

2.3. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

In TPB theory there is an active combination of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control variables resulting in behavioural intention. Actual behaviour stems largely from behavioural intention but is mediated to some degree by perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Empirical studies have often found that the Theory of Planned Behaviour has significantly enhanced predictive ability over the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein 1963; Giles & Cairns, 1995). The construct 'perceived behavioural control' is formed by merging the perceived presence of variables that may accelerate or hinder the performance of behaviour and the perceived power of each of these variables. Actual behavioural control refers to the extent to which a person has the skills, resources, and other prerequisites needed to perform a given behaviour. Actual behavioural control is not easy to correctly measure and so perceived behavioural control is measured through specially designed questionnaires and serves as a proxy measure of the influence.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recognise that factors external to the TRA, such as personality, past experience, learning and demographic characteristics, may also influence behaviour, however, they argue that such influence is indirect, mediated through the components of the model. However, the TPB, shown in Figure 2, allows for the incorporation of additional variables, provided that these variables make a significant contribution to the explanation of behaviour provided by the model (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, this study has included servicescape, perceived quality of food and service as well as customer experience as variables that can influence behavioural intentions.



Source: Siragusa and Dixon (2009)

Figure 2 Model of Theory of Planned Behaviour

2.4. Empirical Review

Salami and Ajobo (2012) explored the consumer perceptions about Fast Food Restaurants in Asaba, Delta state, Nigeria. Adopting survey research design, a total of 180 customers were randomly selected out of which 120 were found useable. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the range of products, availability and consistency of products as well as packaging significantly affect customer perception about service quality at .001. Gender and price do not affect customer perceptions about quality of service. The findings further showed that customers patronized fast food for the change and not because of nutritional value. Furthermore, Isibor and Odia (2014) conducted a comparative study of customer perception of service delivery among 200 restaurants and 200 interstate transport sub-sector customers in Benin city, Edo State. The focus of the study was to determine if there is significant difference between the two sub-sectors in terms of factors that cause customer dissatisfaction. The t-test and z-test were used to analysis the data collected from the customers through questionnaire. The finding revealed that customers of both service sub-sectors are fairly satisfied with a significant difference in their service offerings.

Akekue-Alex and Kalu, (2016) investigated the relationship between positioning strategies (customer expectation, location, service quality and assortment) and customer patronage of fast-food firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive research design. A self-administered questionnaire was administered to a sample size of 123 respondents, which was conveniently extracted from fast food employees out of which 110 copies were found useable. In analyzing the relationship between the variables of interest and test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was employed. The study revealed the relationship between all positioning strategies and customer patronage was not significant. Although the estimated relationship of interest was not spurious but only 2.5% of the variation in customer patronage was explained by the joint influence of customer expectation, location, service quality and assortment.

Ayodele and Panama (2016) investigated the predictors that influenced street food patronage in Anambra state, Nigeria. Data was collected using questionnaire based on a quota sampling of 245 respondents. Factor analysis and multiple regressions were used to reduce data and test hypotheses respectively. Analysis of the data showed that attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, food quality and cultural influence are significant in predicting street food patronage with perceived behavioral control as the best predictor, followed by subjective norm, cultural influence, attitude and food quality in that order.

Nwokah and Nne (2018) assessed the predictor effect of food quality on patronage of quick-service restaurants in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria. The study population comprises ten thousand (10,000) customers of registered and operational Quick-Service Restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State; and the sample size for the study was 370 customers of the restaurants. 330 questionnaires were retrieved, cleared and used for the study. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics while the Spearman Rank Correlation Technique was used to test the hypotheses proposed in the study. The result of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between

food quality and customer repeat purchase behaviour ($r = .612$ and $p < 0.05$) and food quality significantly impacts on customer retention ($r = .684$ and $p < 0.05$) of quick-service restaurants in Port Harcourt.

3. Research methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design. Mixed-methods research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating (or mixing) quantitative and qualitative analysis (and data) into a single study, a series of studies, or a longitudinal program of inquiry (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010, Balakrishnan, 2017). The purpose of mixed-methods research design is that qualitative and quantitative research approaches in combination provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone can provide (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010; Balakrishnan, 2017). The concurrent embedded strategy of mixed methods uses one data collection phase, during which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously. Unlike the traditional triangulation model, a concurrent embedded approach has a primary method that guides the project and a secondary database that provides a supporting role in the procedures. This embedding means that one method addresses one or more research question; and the other method addresses the other research question(s) (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Creswell, 2009).

The quantitative approach adopted experimental research design using field experiment. Field experiments are research studies conducted in realistic situations. In these situations, the experimenter under carefully controlled conditions manipulates one or more independent variables, as the situation will permit (Aaker, Kumar & Day in Osterberg, 2008). This study can be defined as an experimental field study as it was conducted in a real-world food restaurant/canteen with natural settings and in relation to the variables under investigation. This experimental research design was chosen because participants of the study would spend considerable time observing and experiencing the physical environment before, during and after their meals.

3.2. Study Area

This study was conducted in two areas – Southwest and Southsouth geo-political zones of Nigeria. The Southwest is a homogenous cultural setting, while the Southsouth is a heterogenous cultural setting.

3.3. South-West Nigeria

The Southwest Nigeria consists of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states. It is also known as the Southwest geo-political zone of Nigeria. The Yorubas predominantly occupy it. The area lies between longitude 2o31' and 6o00' East and latitude 6o21' and 8o37' North; with a total land area of 77,818 km². The study area is bounded in the East by Edo and Delta states, in the North by Kwara and Kogi states, in the west by the Republic of Benin and in the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The Yorubas make up twenty percent (20%) of Nigeria's population being the second largest tribe (Wikipedia, 2018). Settlements in the Yoruba land can be classified as urban, rural and semi-urban with the capital towns of each of these states being urban. Crop production is the main traditional occupation of the people and smallholder farming characterized by grouping of both cash and food crops is predominant. Apart from farming, a minority of the inhabitants also engage in other occupations like manufacturing, commerce and civil service.

For this current study, Ado-Ekiti, and Osogbo were selected conveniently by the researcher to serve as experimental and control groups respectively. The towns were selected because they are the capitals of Ekiti and Osun states respectively. The state capitals experience high rate of commercial activities, which influences a high number of food restaurants (bukkateria) in the areas. In addition, proximity to the researcher and cost of execution of the study influenced the selection of the study areas.

3.4. South South Nigeria

The other area of this study is the Southsouth Geo-political Zone of Nigeria comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross-River, Delta and Edo States. There are about 32 million people living in the region, which accounts for 22% of Nigeria's total population. 62% are below the age of 30. The population density is 265 people per km². There are 13, 329 settlements, with 94% with less than 5,000 population. The region covers 112,000 km² of land area that is oil affected, while core delta is 75,000 km². The region is very heterogeneous with over 40 different ethnic groups who speak 120 mutually unintelligible languages and dialects. The Ijaw ethnic group is the largest; others include the Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ibibio-Efik, and Igbo sub-groups. The livelihoods distribution shows Agriculture and fishing (48%); trading (17%); services (10%); Education/health (7%). The region lies in the ecological zone described as coastal barrier with

sandy ridge, mangrove swamp, freshwater swamp, and lowland rainforest. The natural resources in the region include petroleum, natural gas, tin, lead, coal, zinc, and arable land. (Francis et al., 2011).

For this current study, Asaba, and Benin-city were selected conveniently by the researcher to serve as experimental and control groups respectively. The towns were selected because they are the capitals of Delta and Edo states respectively. The state capitals experience high rate of commercial activities, which influence a high number of food restaurant (bukateria) settings in the area. In addition, proximity to the researcher and cost of execution of the study influenced the selection of the study areas.

3.5. Study settings

This study was conducted in four restaurant locations in Ado-Ekiti, Osogbo, Asaba and Benin-city. In these restaurants, mainly local, traditional foods and refreshments are served for consumption. These study settings were cases of local but well-established restaurants. The restaurants for each area were comparatively similar with same type of customers. They have the capacity to host an average of 200 customers daily. The restaurants were chosen by comparing the number of customers patronizing, popularity in the area, number of years the restaurants have been established, and the owners have been in operation for 6 to 10 years.

3.6. Sample and Sampling Procedure

Sample size can be determined by using statistical techniques or through other adhoc methods; such adhoc methods could include adopting similar studies and using their sample size as a guide (Aaker et al. in Osterberg, 2008). However, the studies should be comparable regarding the number of groups into which the sample is divided for comparison purposes. Furthermore, the comparable studies should have achieved a satisfactory level of reliability (Aaker et al, in Osterberg, 2008).

Since the population of this study was determined by the number of customers who visited the restaurants within a specified time, this study adopted the adhoc method of determining sample size (Osterberg, 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010; Koci & Sidark, 2014; Hanaysha, 2016). Based on the foregoing, this study adopted the following sample size for each restaurant based on the number of persons who were willing to participate in the survey:

Table 1 Total number of sample respondents

Location	Number of respondents
Ado-Ekiti	108
Osogbo	110
Asaba	108
Benin-city	110
Total	436

Source: Field survey (2026)

3.7. Sampling Procedure

This study adopted convenience sampling following other research works (Ismail & Melewar, 2010; Mohi, 2012; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Osterberg, 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010, Hanaysha, 2016; Malik et al; 2013; Petzer & Mackay, 2014; Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012). The adoption of convenience sampling was because data was collected in a short time and the respondents were often selected because they happened to be in the right place at the right time. After finishing their meals, customers in these canteens were approached whether or not they were willing to complete a questionnaire. The respondents were informed of the study's intent and were assured of the confidentiality of their participation.

3.8. Validity of Research Instrument

Validity of research instrument is the degree to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 20 customers in another food restaurant setting in a campus. The pilot test was conducted before the actual survey to ensure questionnaire design, wording and measurement scales are appropriate. The pilot test revealed that there were no major issues regarding ambiguity, clarity and appropriateness of questions about servicescape, service quality, food quality, customer experience and customer patronage. The pilot test revealed the possible completion time so that minor changes were made to encourage greater response and participation. In

addition, content and face validity were employed through marketing and consumer behaviour experts. The questionnaire was also given to English language experts to help modify the wordings in easier form for the respondents to comprehend.

3.9. Data Analysis Techniques

Pearson Product Moment coefficient (PPMC) was used to assess the relationship between customer experience and patronage (Behavioural intention). The hypothesis for this was given as:

- Ho: $r = 0$ (There is no relationship between customer experience and customer patronage)
- H1: $r \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between customer experience and customer patronage).

4. Data presentation and analysis

4.1. Demographic Distribution of Participants

Demographic description of respondents includes gender, age, marital status, religion, level of education, occupation, average amount spent per meal, and ethnic tribes.

4.2. Distribution of participants by Gender

The distribution of the participants by gender in Table 2 showed that 91.5% of the respondents were male while 8.5% of the respondents were female across the locations. This implies that there were more males than females who patronized food restaurants in Southwest and Southsouth, Nigeria. Females would rather cook and eat in-doors than eat out in food restaurants.

Table 2 Gender distribution of Respondents

Variable	Location	Male	Female	Total
Gender	Ado-Ekiti	96(88.9%)	12(11.1%)	108 (100%)
	Asaba	96(88.9%)	12(11.1%)	108 (100%)
	Osogbo	104(94.5%)	6(5.5%)	110 (100%)
	Benin	103(93.6%)	7(6.4%)	110 (100%)
	Total	399(91.5%)	37(8.5%)	436 (100%)

Source: Field survey (2026)

4.3. Distribution of Respondents by Age

An analysis of the age distribution of the respondents presented in Table 3 showed that across the locations, 46.8% of the respondents were in the age bracket (25-34 years); 21.8% were 35-44 years; 17.4% of the respondents were 18-24 years; 10% of the respondents were between 45-54 years. Interestingly, the two Southsouth locations recorded respondents who were over 64 years (0.01%). This implies that respondents were in the students and working-class age as they are the ones who patronize local food restaurants outside their homes.

Table 3 Age distribution of Respondents

Variable	Location	18-24 years	25-34 Years	35-44 Years	45-54 Years	55-64 Years	Over64 Years
Age	Ado-Ekiti	30(27.8%)	52(48.1%)	18(16.7%)	6(5.6%)	2(1.9%)	-----
	Asaba	6(5.6%)	47(43.5%)	26(24.1%)	22(20.4%)	5(4.6%)	2(1.9%)
	Osogbo	28(25.5%)	52(47.3%)	26(23.6%)	4(3.6%)	-----	-----
	Benin	12(10.9%)	53(48.2%)	25(22.7%)	11(10%)	8(7.3%)	1(0.9%)
	Total	76(17.4%)	204(46.8)	95(21.8%)	43(10%)	15(3.4%)	3(0.01%)

Source: Field survey (2026)

4.4. Mean and standard deviation of Age of respondents

Result in Table 4 showed that the location with the highest mean age was Asaba (\bar{x} = 37, sd = 11); this means that the average age of respondents was 37, and the majority of respondents are between 26 and 48 years of age. In Benin-city respondents mean age (\bar{x} = 35, sd = 11); this means that the average age of respondents was 35, and the majority of respondents are between 24 and 46 years of age. In Ado-Ekiti mean age (\bar{x} = 30, sd = 10); this means that the average age of respondents was 30, and the majority of respondents are between 20 and 40 years of age. In Osogbo (\bar{x} = 30, sd = 8); this means that the average age of respondents was 30, and the majority of respondents are between 22 and 38 years of age. The location with the highest standard deviation (Asaba sd= 11) means that the ages are most spread among the respondents. The location with the least standard deviation (Osogbo, sd= 8) means that the ages of the respondents were least spread. This result also shows that the customers of food restaurants are mainly people within the youth age.

Table 4 Mean and standard deviation of Age of respondents

Variable	Location	Mean	Std dev.
Age	Ado-Ekiti	30	10
	Asaba	37	11
	Osogbo	30	8
	Benin	35	11

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

4.5. Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

An analysis of the marital status distribution of the respondents presented in Table 5 showed that in all locations the number of respondents that are married was higher than those that were single. The table showed that 56.42% of the respondents were married and 43.11% of the respondents were single. Asaba and Benin (southsouth zone) recorded one respondent each that were divorced and widowed respectively. This implies that many respondents who patronize local food restaurants were married people. This is perhaps because though these respondents are married, they work away from home.

Table 5 Marital Status distribution of Respondents

Variable	Location	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced/Separated
Marital Status	Ado-Ekiti	52(48.1%)	56(51.9%)	-----	-----
	Asaba	47(43.5%)	60(55.6%)	-----	1(0.9%)
	Osogbo	36(32.7%)	74(67.3%)	-----	-----
	Benin	53(48.2%)	56(50.9%)	1(0.9%)	-----
	Total	188(43.1%)	246(56.2%)	1(0.1%)	1(0.1%)

Source: Field survey (2026)

4.6. Distribution of Respondents by Religion

An analysis of the religion distribution of the respondents presented in Table 6 shows that Ado-Ekiti (79.6%), Asaba (92.6%) and Benin-city (98.1%) have more Christians in these towns that patronize local food restaurants than Muslims. However, in Osogbo there were more Muslims (53.6%) than Christians with (47.7%) who patronize food restaurants. In total, there were 331 Christian respondents (75.9%), 94 Muslim respondents (21.6%) and 11 (2.6%) other religion respondents who were surveyed. This implies that more Christians patronize local food restaurants than Muslims in southern region of Nigeria.

Table 6 Religion distribution of Respondents

Variable	Location	Christianity	Islam	Others
Religion	Ado-Ekiti	86(79.6%)	19(17.6%)	3(2.8%)
	Asaba	100(92.6%)	7(6.5%)	1(0.9%)
	Osogbo	47(42.7%)	59(53.6%)	4(3.6%)
	Benin	98(89.1%)	9(8.2%)	3(2.7%)
	Total	331(75.9%)	94(21.6%)	11(2.5%)

Source: Field survey (2026)

4.7. Mean and Standard deviation scores on Customer responses to Servicscape (DINESCAPE) Scale

Results in Table 7 showed the mean and standard deviation of responses to servicscape (DINESCAPE) scale. The mean value reveals the degree of agreement or majority of the responses while the standard deviation shows the degree of spread of the responses across the categories of respondents. The table revealed that in Ado-Ekiti and Asaba the mean scores of the responses increased significantly after the servicscape intervention. In Ado-Ekiti, the most improved elements in the servicscape were table layout (\bar{x} = 4.99, sd = 4.214), table setting (\bar{x} = 4.66, sd = 0.475), cleanliness (\bar{x} = 4.58, sd = 0.599) and facility aesthetics (\bar{x} = 4.54, sd = 0.585). In Asaba, the most improved elements were facility aesthetics (\bar{x} = 4.70, sd = 0.760), table layout (\bar{x} = 4.67, sd = 0.670), cleanliness (\bar{x} = 4.60, sd = 0.686) and ambience (\bar{x} = 4.57, sd = 0.782). In all the locations, facility aesthetics mean scores were least before intervention. In Ado-Ekiti and Asaba, the standard deviations in the responses were higher in the pre-intervention indicating a wider array or spread of responses across the respondents. In Osogbo, the response with the highest mean score was service staff (\bar{x} = 4.30, sd = 0.517) and the response with the highest standard deviation score was facility aesthetics (\bar{x} = 2.25, sd = 1.460). In Benin-city, the response with the highest mean score was cleanliness (\bar{x} = 3.98, sd = 0.778) and the response with the highest standard deviation score was ambience (\bar{x} = 2.53, sd = 1.098).

Table 7 Mean and Standard deviation scores of customers' responses to servicscape scale

Dimension	Item	Ado-Ekiti		Ado-Ekiti		Osogbo		Asaba		Asaba		Benin-city	
		Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention	Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention	Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention	Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention	Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention	Pre- Intervention	Post- intervention
		Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev.
Facility aesthetics	The interior design (paintings/pictures) are attractive.	3.50	1.391	4.54	0.585	2.25	1.460	2.49	1.249	4.70	0.760	3.05	1.061
	The colours used on walls create a warm atmosphere.	3.57	1.193	4.53	0.586	2.06	1.422	2.56	1.278	4.58	0.877	3.29	0.942
Ambience	Background music in this restaurant relaxes me.	3.68	1.167	4.48	0.642	3.56	1.088	2.45	1.300	4.44	1.011	2.53	1.098
	The aroma in the restaurant is enticing.	3.98	1.184	4.45	0.584	4.08	0.731	4.07	0.964	4.57	0.782	3.50	0.974
Table setting	The table setting is visually attractive.	3.67	1.253	4.54	0.501	3.83	0.702	2.64	1.315	4.46	1.012	3.30	0.904
	The table ware (utensil) is of high quality.	3.83	1.009	4.46	0.523	3.67	0.940	2.71	1.276	4.45	0.989	3.11	0.942

	The table linen (table, cloth, napkin) are attractive.	3.48	1.308	4.66	0.475	3.61	0.939	2.34	1.216	4.39	1.073	3.07	1.098
Table layout	Seating arrangement gives me enough space.	3.94	1.026	4.99	4.214	3.86	0.760	3.78	1.071	4.56	0.953	3.54	0.885
	Table layout makes it easy for me to move around.	3.80	1.134	4.38	0.533	3.99	0.657	3.78	1.071	4.67	0.670	3.52	1.002
Service staff	The restaurant staff are attractive and they make me feel good.	3.92	1.006	4.43	0.620	4.21	0.543	3.46	1.271	4.48	0.943	3.37	0.897
	Restaurant employees are neat and well dressed.	4.03	1.106	4.53	0.623	4.30	0.517	3.38	1.205	4.46	0.978	3.65	0.923
Cleanliness	Restaurant cleanliness is importance to me when i decide whether to return to this restaurant or not	4.03	0.952	4.58	0.599	4.21	0.576	4.09	0.892	4.48	0.624	3.98	0.778
	A clean restaurant will increase my overall level of satisfaction.	3.97	1.106	4.24	0.622	4.09	0.643	4.27	0.744	4.60	0.686	3.95	0.799

Source: Data Output, 2026

4.8. Hypothesis Testing:

There is no significant relationship between customer experience and customer patronage of food restaurants in Benin, Southsouth Nigeria.

The results as presented in Table 8 shows the correlation of customer experience and customer patronage (pre-intervention) in Benin-city, Southsouth Nigeria. The result showed that all the customer experience constructs had significant positive relationships with customer patronage ($r[110] = p < 0.05$), except for environment, which relationships with the patronage behaviours were not significant. Environment with intention to revisit ($r[110] = 0.106$, $p > 0.05$, $p = 0.272$); environment with intention to spread positive word of mouth ($r[110] = 0.058$, $p > 0.05$, $p = 0.546$); environment with intention to stay longer and spend more ($r[110] = 0.077$, $p > 0.05$, $p = 0.423$). This means that for these relationships, the null hypotheses were not rejected.

The relationship with the highest co-efficient was accessibility with intention to revisit ($r[110] = 0.594$, $p < 0.05$, $p = 0.000$); it was significant. The relationship with the least co-efficient was environment and intention to positive word of mouth ($r[110] = 0.058$, $p > 0.05$, $p = 0.546$); it was not significant. Overall, customer experience had a higher relationship with the customers' intention to revisit than other patronage behaviours. Obtaining a p-value less than 0.05 significance level for a two-tailed test, the relationship between customer experience and patronage of food restaurant in Benin-city South-South Nigeria is significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis.

Table 8 Correlation co-efficient (Pre-intervention) between Customer Experience and Customer Patronage of Food Restaurant in Benin-city, Southsouth Nigeria

		Intention to Revisit	Intention to spread positive word of mouth	Intention to stay longer and spend more
Environment	Pearson Correlation	0.106	0.058	0.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.272	0.546	0.423
	N	110	110	110
Benefit	Pearson Correlation	0.392**	0.344**	0.292**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.002
	N	110	110	110
Convenience	Pearson Correlation	0.521**	0.587**	0.345**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	110	110	110
Accessibility	Pearson Correlation	0.594**	0.482**	0.278**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.003
	N	110	110	110
Utility	Pearson Correlation	0.529**	0.356**	0.189*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.048
	N	110	110	110
Incentive	Pearson Correlation	0.497**	0.396**	0.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	110	110	110
Trust	Pearson Correlation	0.467**	0.510**	0.322**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.001
	N	110	110	110
Intention to Revisit	Pearson Correlation	1	0.446**	0.271**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.004
	N	110	110	110
Intention to spread positive word of mouth	Pearson Correlation	0.446**	1	0.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
	N	110	110	110

Intention to stay longer and spend more	Pearson Correlation	0.271**	0.774**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.000	
	N	110	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); Source: Output of Data Analysis (2026)

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study findings suggest that the variables of servicescape (aesthetics of the facility, ambience, table settings, layout, staff attitude, and cleanliness) impacted restaurant customer experiences and customer repeat patronage in restaurants across the South-West and South-South regions of Nigeria; values placed by both customers and restaurant owners on improvements to the servicescape environment also signal both groups view improvements to the servicescape environment as critical to improving the overall customer experience in food restaurants. Additionally, the differences between the pre- and post-intervention results provide evidence of the impact servicescape interventions had on customers throughout the two study areas at both time periods.

Moreover, similar responses (servicescape improvement) indicate customers from each region do not perceive any significant amount of cultural differences in regards to how they perceive servicescape (physical environment), customer experience (interaction with food/service provider through time), and patronage (repeat purchases, i.e., dining experience, brand loyalty). Therefore, customers from either geo-political region have approximately the same expectations in terms of the physical and service environments of food restaurants.

Therefore, owners of restaurants should focus on important features of a restaurant environment (servicescape) that positively affect customer experience and patronage. The areas of primary importance in servicescape are facility appearance (aesthetics), ambience (overall atmosphere), service staff, and cleanliness. A priority for management is to have enough service staff to properly provide the necessary level of cleanliness (e.g. clear used plates promptly from the table), maintain order at the table (set-up and arrangement of tables), and ensure that tableware is clean. Background music also contributes to a customer's experience by creating an enjoyable atmosphere, making customers feel relaxed and allowing them to linger longer at the restaurant. Service staff uniforms project a professional image to customers; therefore, the maintenance of neat and consistent service staff uniforms is part of the service culture within the restaurant.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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