



Effects of the Meal Experience on the Post-purchase Behavioural Intentions of Customers of Grade Three Restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana

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Authors' contributions

Author FBF designed the study, managed literature searches and performed the statistical analysis, Author BO wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Meal experience is the key to customer satisfaction in restaurants, whereas experiences customer's encounter determines the kind of post-purchase intentions embarked upon. The main objective was to examine the effect of meal experience on customers' post-purchase behavioural intentions (PPBI) to grade three restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents whilst questionnaire was used to collect data and analyzed using SPSS. Results revealed that about ninety percent of respondents rated their meal experience as good. Majority avowed that they will re-visit and recommend, whilst a few boldly stated they will opt for alternative intentions anytime dissatisfaction is experienced. Furthermore, there was a significant effect of meal experience on PPBI with the exception of alternative intentions. Conclusively, customers recommend and re-visit only when they attain a positive meal experience. Restauranters are recommended to periodically solicit ideas from customers on how best to sustain meal experience.

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1. INTRODUCTION

People patronize restaurants for different reasons at different times. As some go to buy service delivery, service quality, food and beverage, others buy memories, meal experience and value [1]. A meal is always regarded as an essential part of a leisure journey where people effortlessly draw attention to unique culinary experiences in restaurants, [2,3]. Experience is any sensation resulting from a person's participation in an activity [4].

The concept of meal experience was first used by Campwell-Smith in 1967. This meal experience takes place anytime someone eats out or patronises a hospitality facility anywhere apart from the home. It encompasses an array of different thoughts and events that requires payment for goods and services [5,6]. Meal experience is defined as the combination of mainly several factors such as food, service, atmosphere, as well as some minor factors in order to achieve customer satisfaction [7,8,9,10]. In addition, [11] identified in a conceptual model that food quality, service quality and physical environment all lead to customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Furthermore, [12] in his dining satisfaction and return patronage model and [13] customer expectation model confirmed that meal experience was dependent on food, service and atmosphere.

Overall meal experience is the aggregation of all the variables that contribute to a meal experience. These variables leading to PPBI affect the decisions made by customers. Generally, overall meal experience plays an important role in predicting behavioural intentions [14] whilst [15] opined that, as people enjoy favourable overall meal experience, they adopt positive PPBI which includes re-visit and recommendations. Thus, [16] it is confirmed that previous overall meal experience result, links up to consumers' intention to repurchase and recommend.

Post-purchase behavioural intention is defined as the future behaviour commitment to purchase a product or service when other alternatives are possible [17]. Again, [18] outline PPBI as re-visit intention, recommendation and alternative intention. Furthermore, re-visit intention is termed as a situation whereby a customer intends to patronize the same premises several times [19].

Another positive intention that is recommendation, mostly takes place after a customer has enjoyed a meal, received better service, enjoyed variety of meals or paid a reasonable price for food [20].

On the contrary, alternative intentions spring up when dissatisfied customers take detrimental actions including word of mouth criticisms, switching patronage to other restaurants/boycott and complaining thereby reducing the rate of patronage [21,22]. More so, [23] emphasized that most dissatisfied customers choose not to complain directly to restaurant manager but quietly look for alternatives. This affirms that, alternative occur when customers are dissatisfied [24] or diners' meal experience have professed to be below the anticipated level of expectation.

There have been a number of studies on meal experience worldwide [9,11,13,25,]. In Ghana, there have been studies on food service quality [26] meal experience and food safety [2, 27, 28], but these studies did not focus on meal experience and PPBI of customers. Most restaurant patrons who encounter negative meal experience look for alternatives and also influence diners around them [22].

This study therefore seeks to examine the effect of meal experience on customers' PPBI to grade three restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi. The main objective of the study is to examine the effect of meal experience on customers' PPBI to grade 3 restaurants. Further analysis was undertaken to find out whether there is a significant difference between the meal experience of males and females. The research hypothesis states that, there is no significant relationship between customers' meal experience and post-purchase behavioural intentions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Sekondi-Takoradi (Twin City) which is situated within the Shama Ahanta East Metropolis (S.A.E.M) and is part of the Western Region of Ghana. The Twin City boasts of an increase in hotels and restaurants, together with the expansion of some existing ones to meet the growing demands for people. Positivist research philosophy was used because a quantitative approach was needed to solicit for information from larger number of people [29]. Explanatory research design focused on why certain things happened, be it simple or complex,

in order to develop causal explanations on why one thing affects the other [30,31]. Cross-sectional survey provided information determining the link between two things; That is the effect of x on y [32], such as the link between meal experience and PPBI.

Primary data was collected from customers who dined out in grade three restaurants and Secondary information were obtained from Ghana Tourism Authority, managers books, journals, articles and the internet. The target population for the study comprised all people who dined out in grade three restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi during the month of February, 2014. The sample size was calculated based on the formula required for accuracy in estimating proportions. This was done by considering the standard normal deviation set at 1.96 which corresponds to 95% confidence level, percentage picking a choice 50% which is equal to 0.5, and confidence interval (0.05 = ±5).

Table 1. Sample allocation to restaurants

Restaurant	Average daily cover	Sample allocated
A	88	33
B	44	17
C	40	15
D	39	15
E	52	20
F	60	23
G	40	15
H	27	10
I	100	38
J	63	24
K	53	20
L	49	19
M	52	20
N	60	23
O	44	17
P	39	15
Q	27	10
R	40	15
S	27	10
T	67	25
Total	1011	384

Source: Responds from restaurants' owners, 2014

The researchers after seeking permission from all the 20-registered grade three restaurants in the Sekondi-Takoradi also solicited for information concerning their monthly and daily average covers. For individual restaurant, each day had different number of guests catered for, so here, the daily covers were put together and divided by the total number of days the

restaurants operated within the month. The recorded average daily customers ranged from 27-100 per day. Each restaurant visited gave an estimated average daily customer cover and for all the restaurants, it added up to a total population of 1,011. The sample size of 384 was distributed among all the registered grade 3 restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi. This was done in proportion to their average daily cover, for example Restaurant A: $88/1011 \times 384 = 33$ diners.

A rating scale from poor to excellent was utilized to enable respondents assess the effect of meal experience on PPBI. The consent of customers were sought and questionnaire was filled just after eating their meals before exit. In all, out of the 384 questionnaires distributed, 272 completely filled were useful for the data analysis, representing a response rate of 70.8%. The quantitative data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Product for Service Solution (S.P.S.S.) version 17. Specifically, percentages, frequencies, tables, cross-tabulations, means and standard deviations were used to analyze the data. Also, Independent T test was used to find out if there was any significant difference between the meal experience of males and females, whiles chi square (χ^2) was used to test the relationship between meal experience and PPBI.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Meal Experience

The meal experience was assessed based on respondents' ratings on food, menu, price, service and atmosphere on a scale of 1-5 (poor-excellent). Out of the 272 respondents, a quarter (68) were females, whilst three quarters (204) were males. An independent T-test was performed to determine whether there were any significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in food, menu, price, service, environment and overall meal experiences is reported by males and females.

The results did not show a significant difference in the overall meal experience scores for males (Mean=3.76, SD=0.48) and females (Mean=3.93, SD=0.41); $t(185) = 2.25, p = 0.31$. In spite of the fact that there was no significant difference in the meal experiences of males and females, females rated their meal experience higher than males. Additionally, there were no differences in the experiences of males and females with regards to the other components of the meal experience except for menu.

There was a significant difference in the menu experiences of males (Mean=3.71, SD=0.73) and females (Mean=3.96, SD=0.55); $t(249) = 2.57, p = 0.03$. This result suggests that women tend to have a more favourable experience with the menus of restaurants than their male counterparts. Interestingly, the mean scores of females on all the components of the meal experience was higher than that of their male counterparts except for service which had a mean score of 3.70 and 3.65 for males and females respectively.

3.2 PPBI of Respondents

PPBI was gauged by three items namely recommendation, re-visit and alternative intentions. These three items were used to determine whether respondents' meal experiences merited recommendation, re-visit or alternative intentions. Generally, as more patrons of the restaurant agreed to recommend and re-visit, less agreed to alternative intentions. Also, 78.7% of respondents indicated that they would recommend the restaurants to others whereas 83.2% indicated that they would re-visit the restaurants. However, only 30.9% had alternative intentions whereby two main recurring themes were received from: firstly, once meal experience is below expectation, defection was the best option. Secondly, when attention drawn to restaurant operators' concerning dissatisfaction of the meal experience does not yield to change, defection takes place.

This finding is in consonance with the supposition in [21,22,23] which opined that whenever a customer is dissatisfied with the meal experience, alternative intentions are considered. It has been further suggested in [24] that alternative intentions occur when dining experience is professed to be below the anticipated level of expectation.

3.3 Meal Experiences and PPBI

The results from Table 4, shows that all those who rated meal experience as poor disagreed to recommend the restaurants to others. For those who assessed the meal experience as fair, 58.9 percent agreed to recommend the restaurants to others. For those who rated the meal experiences as good, 84.6 percent agreed to recommend such restaurants to others. Again, 95.2 percent of respondents who assessed the meal experience as very good, agreed to recommend such restaurants to others. Also, respondents who assessed meal experience as excellent agreed to recommend such restaurants to others.

Furthermore, the chi-square test of independence indicated a significant relationship between meal experience and recommendation ($p = 0.001$) which suggests that there was a positive relationship between meal experience and recommendation of restaurant to others. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between meal experience and recommendation of restaurant to others were rejected. Also, at a degree of freedom of ($df-16$), the calculated chi-square value of 38.988^a at significant level 0.05 was greater than χ^2 table value of 26.296 which meant that there was a significant relationship.

Considering the cross-tabulation between assessment of meal experience and re-visit intentions to restaurants, results indicated in Table 4, shows that all who rated meal experience as poor disagreed to re-visit. On re-visit intentions, 64.4 percent of those who rated meal experience as fair agreed to re-visit whilst 12.3 percent disagreed to do so. Again, 90.4 percent of the respondents assessed meal experience to be good and agreed to re-visit. Also, 92.7 percent rated it as very good and agreed to re-visit such restaurants.

Table 2. Differences in meal experience between males and females

Variable	Male			Female			t	P
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N		
Food	3.87	0.54	184	3.98	0.56	64	1.37	0.57
Menu	3.71	0.73	185	3.96	0.55	66	2.57	0.03*
Price	3.73	0.89	195	3.84	0.89	69	0.87	0.76
Service	3.70	0.63	173	3.65	0.59	59	0.54	0.93
Environment	3.64	0.57	170	3.88	0.44	59	0.54	0.20
Meal experience	3.76	0.48	139	3.93	0.41	48	2.25	0.31

Source: Survey by the author, 2014

Table 3. PPBI of Respondents (N=272)

Post-purchase characteristics of respondents	Agreed	Percentage in agreement	Mean	Standard deviation
Recommend restaurant	211	78.7	4.03	0.865
Re-visit the restaurant	224	83.2	4.09	0.857
Alternative intentions	83	30.9	2.97	1.339

Source: Survey by the author, 2014

Table 4. Meal Experience and PPBI

Meal experience	PPBI			χ^2 p-value (χ^2)
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
	Recommendations			
Poor	100.0	0.0	0.0	38.988 ^a
Fair	11.0	30.1	58.9	p=0.001
Good	1.6	13.8	84.6	df-16
Very good	2.4	2.4	95.2	
Excellent	0.0	0.0	100.0	
	Re-visit intentions			
Poor	100.0	0.0	0.0	42.847 ^a
Fair	12.3	23.3	64.4	p=0.000
Good	3.2	6.4	90.4	df-16
Very good	2.4	4.9	92.7	
Excellent	0.0	0.0	100.0	
	Alternative intentions			
Poor	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.195 ^a
Fair	35.6	34.2	30.2	p=0.171
Good	41.5	22.8	35.7	df-16
Very good	58.5	17.1	24.4	
Excellent	0.0	100.0	9.7	

Source: Survey by the author, 2014

Further analysis using chi-square test of independence indicated that there was a significant relationship between meal experience and re-visit intentions to restaurants ($p = 0.000$). Also, at a degree of freedom of ($df-16$), the calculated chi-square value of 42.847^a at significant level 0.05 was greater than χ^2 table value of 26.296. This implies that there was a significant relationship between meal experiences and re-visit intentions to restaurants. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between meal experience and re-visit intentions to restaurants was rejected.

The results from respondents' alternative intentions showed that when meal experiences were fair (34.2%) and good (22.8%), customers were unable to decide whether they should embark on alternative intentions or not. Also, when meal experiences were good (41.5%) and very good (58.5%) respondents ardently disagreed to alternative intentions. In contrast, all respondents who assessed alternative intentions

poor and fair (30.2%) indicated that, they will agree to alternative intentions. As 35.7 agreed that customers embarking on alternative intentions are good, 24.4 percent posit it as a very good idea.

Additionally, the chi-square analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between meal experience and alternative intentions of respondents to restaurants ($p = 0.171$). Again, at a degree of freedom of ($df-16$), the calculated chi-square value of 0.195^a at a significant level of 0.05 was greater than the χ^2 table value of 26.296 which means the null hypothesis failed to reject. Thus, there is no significant relationship between meal experiences and alternative intentions of customers.

This finding is in consonance with the suppositions in [14,15,16]. These researchers observed that meal experience plays a vital role in the life of customers who remain loyal. They further conceive that respondents adopt positive PPBI that are re-visit and word-of-mouth intentions.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of meal experience on customers' PPBI to grade three restaurants in Sekondi-Takoradi. The study confirmed some phenomena which states that more males patronize restaurants more frequently than females [6]. Meal experience was assessed as good with respect to the various factors (food, service, menu, price & atmosphere) used for rating respondents' assessment. This contradicts what was postulated by several authors findings [7,8, 9,10,11,12,13] which stated that food, service and atmosphere were the main determinant factors of meal experience. The grading ranged from 36% to 43% good, besides aggregation of the overall meal experience recorded as high as 90% representing good, very good and excellent were recorded.

Furthermore, [14,15,16,19] asserts that positive PPBI emanates from positive meal experience. This was confirmed in Table 3, when more than three quarters of the respondents agreed to re-visit the restaurant and recommend. At $df=16$, recommendation ($p=0.000$) and re-visit ($p=0.001$) had a probability value ($p<0.05$) indicating that there is a significant relationship between meal experience and PPBI. This revelation from the study, confirms the assertion made [14,15,16] that there is a link between meal experience and PPBI. Result for hypothesis tested indicated that reject H_0 for re-visit and recommendation, then fail to reject alternative intentions.

However only about one third of respondents openly indicated that they will embark on alternative intentions if their expectations are not met whilst seventy percent did not disclose exactly what they will do to their dissatisfied meal experience. Again, results from the research in agreement to literature from authors [21,22] has proved that dissatisfied customers either leave without complaining, or take detrimental actions including word of mouth criticisms, switching patronage to other restaurants/boycott and then complain to others thereby reducing patronage. Conclusively, the research revealed that there was a significant relationship between meal experience and customers' PPBI.

5. CONCLUSION

Most patrons of grade 3 restaurants were males. This is no exception from literature reviewed because traditionally, males eat out more than

females especially during lunch time in grade three restaurants. Overall meal experience according to [7,9,10,11,12,13] depends on certain major factors such as food, service and environment. Theories adopted from [12,13] did not also include price and menu as variables that affects PPBI. On the contrary, respondents' conclusion was that meal experience that has an effect on PPBI mainly depends on menu and price as significant determinants. Similarly, it is only when these factors are assessed and rated as good that a positive meal experience is assured. The study unearthed that, as high as 90% rated overall meal experience as good, very good and excellent which also indicates that positive meal experience was encountered.

There is a significant relationship between meal experience and PPBI in relation to re-visit and recommendation intentions. Customers patronize or re-visit a restaurant only when their expectations are met. They also recommend restaurants to others only when they are sure of a positive meal experience. However, with disconfirmation in [12], most of the customers' who developed feelings of dissatisfaction do not repeat their patronage because they had alternative intentions. Unfortunately, majority do not express their displeasure to restaurant managers for amendment to be effected.

It is highly recommended that, restaurant operators should solicit ideas from customers, on how to sustain customers' meal experience. This can be through a suggestion box or through the supply of a questionnaire in order to gather information on customer's meal experience and expectations. More so, management should organize periodic in-service training for their staff and ensure that good staff-customer relationship is maintained in order to encourage diners to embark on positive PPBI. Resource persons can be occasionally invited during monthly meetings to enlighten restaurant managers on contemporary trends, customer/staff expectations and other challenging issues.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach can be used to gain more insight into meal experience and PPBI whilst diners can also be picked from grade 1 and 2 restaurants and/or star rated hotels for a comparative study. Another comparative study can be undertaken to examine the extent to which activities of managers and employees could affect customers' meal experience and PPBI to restaurants. Finally, future studies should seek to establish ways repeat visitors can

be sustained in restaurants in order to enhance productivity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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