



The Quick Service Restaurant Business in Nigeria: Exploring the Emerging Opportunity for Entrepreneurial Development and Growth

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Abstract

Amidst the current global crisis, one line of business in Nigeria that continues to promise greater returns on investment is the Quick Service Restaurant. Despite the presence of economic, social and political dilemma in the country, the business continues to thrive. This paper, therefore, by presenting an in-depth knowledge of the industry exposes its potentials for growth and also highlights the prospects and challenges of operating fast food business in Nigeria. It goes further to identify and recommend the required skills needed by its emerging entrepreneurs to succeed in an environment such as Nigeria's.

Keywords: Fast food outlets, Franchise, Nutrition, Eateries, Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

Although, the concept of fast food retailing, also known as quick service restaurants evolved in Nigeria about 35 years ago by UAC, from the coffee shops of its Kingsway Departmental Stores, which later transformed into Kingsway Rendezvous, the organized fast food industry is fast emerging in the country. The industrial landscape has witnessed the influx of unprecedented numbers of fast food operators since the opening of the first fast food outlet in Nigeria, at Yaba, in 1986 by Mr. Biggs, a subsidiary of UAC Nigeria Plc (www.mrbiggs.com). At present, there are over 150 brand names in the country. Also, the Southwestern Nigeria alone now boast of about 500 outlets, of different sizes, which could be classified as standardized eateries, established by corporate individuals and organizations (Fakokunde, 2011). All these and other developments, according to The Punch of Thursday, 12 November, 2009 revealed that one line of business that keeps going and remains sustainable amidst the current global economic meltdown is the restaurant business.

Meaning Of 'Fast Food'

According to Ogunlade (2008) "food" is used as a collective term for the end products that consumers eat or drink. It is considered not merely as a collection of inputs to satisfy human nutritional requirements, but also possesses a multi-dimensional set of consumer-satisfying attributes such as taste, appearance, security, convenience etc. The term "fast food" according to (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011). was first recognized by Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1951. It refers to food that can be easily prepared and served very quickly in an outlet to consumers. It can be served directly from oven to table (sit-in) or presented in form of take-out packages or containers (take-away). Common fast food menu found in outlets worldwide apart from drinks include pies, chips, fries, sandwiches, pizzas, noodles, chilis, salads, potatoes, rice, ice-cream, coffee, candies, hamburgers, fish, beef, chicken, turkey, hot dogs etc. Also, various sizes, types and kinds of outfits exist worldwide for the purpose of retailing fast foods. These range from carts, wagons (Jakle, 1999), stands, kiosks to restaurants, and modern day fast food retail outlets, better known as Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs). Fast food ventures are food and located everywhere with round the clock services where applied e.g. in convenient shops, drives, filling stations, schools, cashpoints etc.

2.0 Classification of Fast Food Services

Mainly fast food outlets can be classified as either providing unstandardized or standardized services. The unstandardized outlets are usually the unregistered small operators, providing informal but fast casual table services to customers. In this category are the traditional food vendors, cafeterias and casual dining restaurants. On the other hand, the standardized outlets include the registered food retail outfits with formalized business names and organized structures, whose operations are usually large-scaled and certified by appropriate regulating authorities. In this category, are the single-branch eateries and chained quick service restaurants that provide minimal table service to customers. Also unlike the former, which is considered to have existed for generations, the latter category is regarded as modern and emerging as a result of recent rapid urban developments in various countries of the world. Outlets in the organized sector are usually established by either corporate individuals or multinational organizations concentrating mainly in urban centers.

The Formal and Informal Fast Food Industry

In this light, the fast food industry can thus be divided into two: the formal sector and the informal sector. The formal fast food industry consists of the newly emerging organized and registered outlets of different sizes providing

large scaled standardized eat-in and take-away services to consumers. The informal sector consists of the plethora of usually unregistered small operators and restaurants providing unstandardized fast but casual services to consumers.

The Concept of the Modern Fast Food

The concept of the modern fast food could be traced to the take-out food services popularized by the then automats restaurants, which flourished greatly in the U.S during and after the First World War (Farrell, 2007). Similarly, as automobiles became popular during this period, drive-in restaurants (later known as drive-throughs) were introduced. The second Whitecastle hamburger restaurant founded in 1921 in Wichita, Kansas was regarded as the first fast food chain in America. Today the U.S. has the largest fast food industry in the world with locations in over 100 countries. The U.K. is also credited with the highest number of fast food per person, followed by Australia and the U.S. In 2008, England alone accounted for 25% of all fast food in the world.

The modern fast food industry is highly commercialized and characterized by various pre-formulated procedures and food preparation methods usually set up with the intention of minimizing production cost and delivery time. Greater emphasis is always placed in ensuring certain level of flavor and quality consistency of products and quick services as expected by customers (Iwarere and Fakokunde, 2011). Various variants of cuisines and dishes are popularized by fast food restaurants across the globe. While pizza is wide known in the U.S., sushi is common in Japan, Kebab, fish and chips are popular fast foods in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

It is noteworthy that the business of fast food retailing is fast spreading and striving globally with numerous fast food ventures located all over the world (Parsa and Kwansa, 2001). McDonald's is considered as the largest operator of fast food in the world, with over 31,000 restaurants located in 120 countries, on six continents. The busiest fast food in the world is McDonald's in Moscow, which was opened on January 31, 1990. Other fast food multinationals include Burger King, Kenturcky Fried Chicken (KFC), Big-mac, Pizza Hut, Subway and Taco Bell. In Nigeria, the leading fast food operators are Mr. Bigg's, Tantalizers, Tastee Fried Chicken (TFC), Sweet Sensation, Tetrazzini and Chicken Republic. The indigenous South African fast food market is dominated by Nandos, Black Steer and Chicken Licken. In Canada, PizzaPizza and 241 Pizza are among the leading indigenous fast food operators (Wikipedia, 2010).

Consumption records show that about \$110 billion was spent on fast food in 2000 as against \$6 billion in 1970 in the U.S. alone (Schlosser, 2001). Employment records also shows that over 2 million workers are employed in the areas of fast food operations and servicing in the United States. Although the organized fast food industry loses substantial market share to the informal sector, sales figures of \$ 142 billion in 2006, are expected to increase by 5% yearly. In India, the fast food industry is growing by 40% yearly (Wikipedia, 2010).

3.0 An Overview of the Nigerian Fast Food Industry

According to the Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria (AFFCON), the Nigerian fast food industry is healthy and currently worth about N190 billion with the potential to grow bigger (Vanguard, 2009).

Also, the industry is considered as highly labour intensive. In Nigeria, it was identified as a leading overall employer of labour, looking at the food supply chain from farm to the table. The management and operations of QSRs require and attract various job opportunities and professionals, including service providers and suppliers. These ranges from farmers, caterers, horticulturists, interior decorators, technicians, food technologists to estate agents, architects, engineers, auditors, accountants etc.

Although the list of new entrants increases daily in Nigeria, as earlier mentioned, only seven fast food owner-operators are identified in this paper as dominating the industry with less than 50% share of the total industry market as at 2007. There are other numerous indigenous QSRs holding sway in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt and other urban locations, namely Sweet Sensation, Chicken Lovers, Chicken Licking, Mama Cass, Captain Cook, Chicken Palace, Spices, etc. providing varieties of Africana and continental cuisines to teeming customers. The presence of international brands such as Nandos, Steers and St. Elmos is also felt in the industry. At present, there are about 100 brand names in the industry. Some big established outlets now offer franchise opportunities and arrangements for willing individual investors and entrepreneurs to own and operate fast food businesses with their brand names. Through these arrangements and others, it is planned that more restaurants will be opened in due course to meet the ever-yearning desires of Nigerians for an ideal fast food industry in the country (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

Due to the socio-cultural background of the various ethnic settlements of the country, the Nigerian formal fast food industry operates amidst its more active informal counterpart, which is characterized by unregistered indigenous operators also providing restaurant services to the populace. But, the fast food industry is quick in changing the existing pattern by distinguishing itself into an organised structure providing healthy, modern and local menus, with class, status and taste attached to it (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011; Ukaegbu, 2000).

Mr. Bigg's is considered as the largest operator of fast food in Nigeria, with over 200 outlets, including its franchised locations, located in about 48 cities in all the states of the federation. Mr. Bigg's also operates outside Nigeria with outlets in Kumasi and Accra, both in Ghana. The popular Mr. Bigg's brand emerged in August 1986 as a result of intensive consumer research aimed at relaunching an ideal quick service restaurant in Nigeria. Recently, in response to increasing interest in local cuisines and ingredients, the Village Kitchen was introduced into the Mr. Bigg's brand (Ukaegbu, 2000; Alanana, 2003; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

Tantalizers, established by an indigenous entrepreneur, is another leading fast food chain in Nigeria. Its first outlet located at Festac Town, Lagos was first opened to customers on 1 May 1997. Tantalizers, now regarded as the fastest growing indigenous QSR in Nigeria, has about 50 outlets nationwide, with about 21 locations in Lagos metropolis alone. It has staff strength of about 2000 and offers wide varieties of patented fast food products to its numerous customers including both Africana and Continental dishes. Of recent, franchise arrangements have been made to establish more outlets across the country (Raimi and Towobola, 2011; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

Tastee Fried Chicken, commonly known as TFC, is also a popular QSR in Nigeria. The first outlet established in 1996 by one Mrs. Olayinka Pamela Adebayo and located in Victoria Island, a choice area of Lagos was considered as the largest outlet in Nigeria, then. TFC was established with the aim of offering for Nigerians a world-class fast food services modeled after the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). TFC now has more than 10 retailing outlets in the country. The proprietress, Mrs. Adedayo is in the forefront of harmonizing and regulating the operations of fast food industry in Nigeria, with the founding recently of the Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria (AFFCON), where she is the founding president (Ukaegbu, 2000; Alanana, 2003).

Chicken Republic, a subsidiary of Food Concepts, S. A., is another top-5 QSR chain operating in Nigeria. Chicken Republic launched in 2005, with about 19 outlets in Nigeria and 1 outlet in South Africa, is considered as the fastest growing fast food franchise in West Africa. With over 6 million pieces of chicken sold in 2007 alone, Chicken Republic is also considered as the foremost chicken brand in Nigeria, with about 5% capture of the market, and an estimated growth rate of 40%. It targets the undeserved areas of major cities regarded as “virgin” markets of smaller cities (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010).

General Characteristics of QSRs in Nigeria

The fast food industry in Nigeria is modeled after McDonald’s and dominated by indigenous entrepreneurs. According to Fakokunde (2011), their sizes range from small, medium and big outlets. Mostly, the smaller ones are established by individual investors, while the few bigger ones are owned by corporate organizations. They can therefore be categorized according to their operational capacity i.e. staff strength, number of customers and capital outlay as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Categories of Fast Food Outlets in Nigeria

Size	Estimated Capital	No of Staff	No of Customers (Daily Average)
Small	Less than N5m	Below 20	Below 250
Medium	N5m – N10m	20 – 50	250 – 1000
Big	Above N10m	Above 50	Above 1000

Source: Research Survey.

The Punch of Thursday, November, 12, 2009 also reported that interested individuals might not require a huge amount of money to start a mini outlet in Nigeria, if only the business plan is compact enough to offer reasonable satisfaction. This report corroborates experts’ advice that individuals take advantage of their hobbies and talents in baking by starting their own mini fast food ventures, specializing in pastries, with only few baking tools and smaller equipment such as the kitchen oven (bizstartuphub.com).

Another common characteristic of fast food restaurants in Nigeria is their concentration in what could be considered as strategic locations in major commercial and individual areas. They do not relent in making their presence felt in such locations by adorning their imposing structures with colourful and attractive architectural designs.

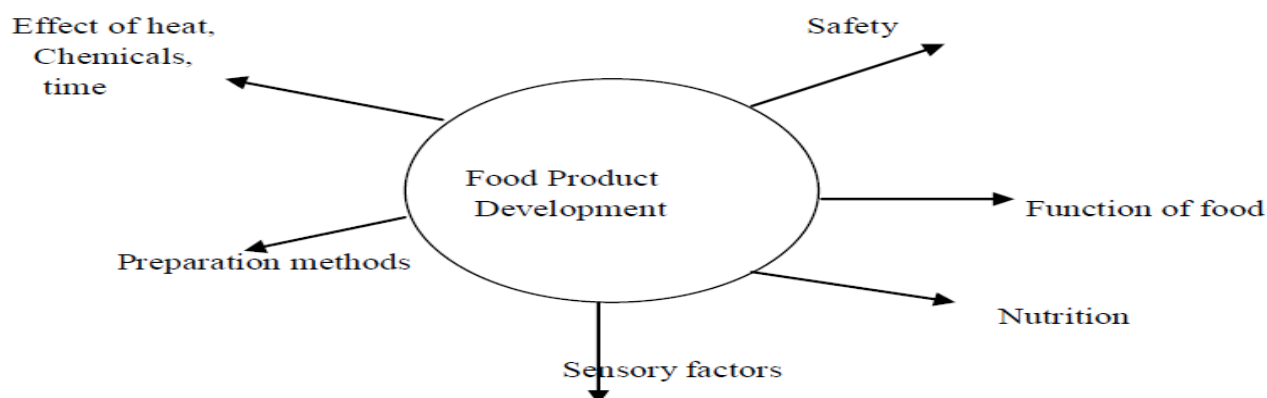
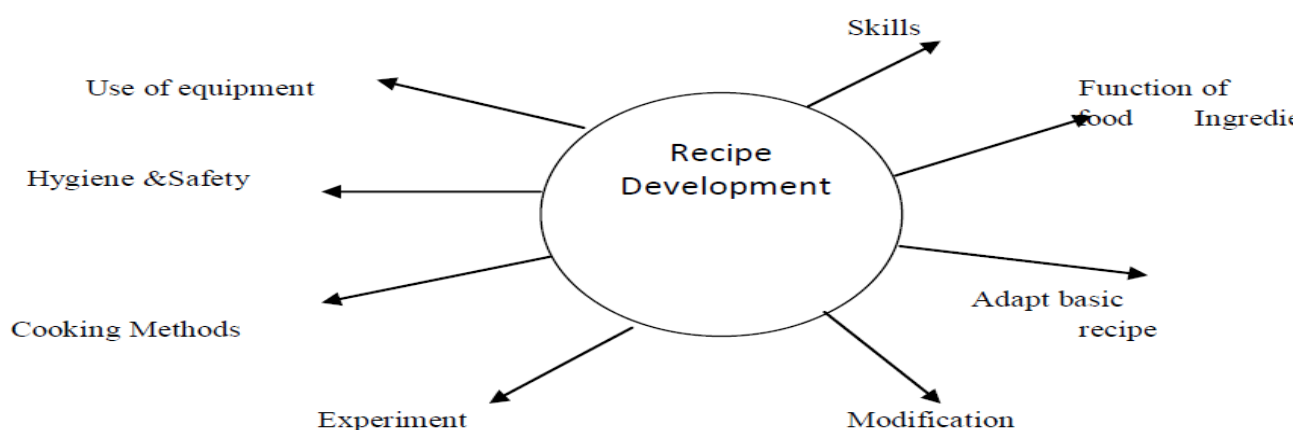
Also due to rapid social transformation in the country, the main menu of fast food restaurants which used to be exclusively foreign and continental cuisines like hamburgers, fried rice, jollof rice, salads, hot dogs, meat pies, coffees, chips, pizzas, ice-creams, soft drinks etc are now translating into local and traditional dishes such as ofada (white rice), iyan (pounded yam), amala (yam flour), asaro (porridge), emu (palm wine) etc. Some restaurants now offer traditional foods only. Notwithstanding, restaurants providing specialized products/services such as ice-cream only, pizza- only, outdoor- only, Chinese-only menus are still striving in various parts of the country.

4.0 Basic Skills Needed in Running Fast Food Business: Tips for Entrepreneurs

Ogunlade (2008) highlights the basic skills needed by entrepreneurs in setting up fast food ventures as follows:

- Analyzing and following a design brief
- Learning about food ingredients and their uses in food products
- Nutritions and nutritional analysis
- Food science
- Understanding the process of food product development
- Hygiene and safety
- Quality and how it can be measured
- Sensory testing
- Writing a specification and testing against it
- Learning about industrial food production on a large scale
- Developing skills in food preparation and cooking
- Evaluating and testing food products
- Learning about food packaging and labeling
- Information

Ogunlade (2008) further illustrates the practical tasks, knowledge and skills needed by entrepreneurs in food product and recipe development with the spider charts showing in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Food Product Development Chart**Figure 2: Recipe Development Chart**

Source: Ogunlade (2008)

The above illustrations identifies the basic skills needed in running a fast food venture to include practical cooking skills, product and recipe design and development skills, hygiene, safety and nutritional skills and managerial skills.

Since the art of fast food business involves changing raw materials into food products, the fast food operator needs exceptional practical knowledge in processing the raw items into quality foods ready to be consumed, using preparation and cooking methods such as washing, scrubbing, peeling, slicing, grating, frying, boiling, roasting, baking etc. Practical cooking skills also involve the correct use and application of tools, equipment and other cooking utensils like knives, spoons, blenders, mixers and ovens.

A successful set-up of a fast food business also requires vast product design and development knowledge. The process of designing a food product can start with matching a good product idea with a target audience e.g. snacks food for youth, students and low income earners. According to Ogunlade (2008) the process involves analysing the design brief, gathering information, producing a specification and quality checks.

Also, as stated on punchontheweb.com., the essential tips for entrepreneurs willing to start their own fast food venture also include:

- Identify a suitable location, where there are a number of prospective customers. This corroborates (The Food Institute Report, 2006) that apart from speedy service, QSRs are now focusing on locations to garner increased sales.
- Proper market survey.
- Let customers determine what is produced. McGarry (2010) also asserts that a successful concept is the one that adapts to local tastes and cultures. Menu items should therefore be translated into the culture in which they are introduced.

The emphasis on food hygiene, safety and nutritional wellbeing of consumers is also increasing. The Daily Champion of 12 February, 2010 reported that the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the food regulatory agency in Nigeria shut down a popular outlet for failure to comply with specified hygiene standards. While food hygiene and safety rules are enforced to identify food hazards and prevent contaminations and poisoning, nutritional skills are therefore needed by entrepreneurs in determining the appropriate uses and effects of food ingredients on consumer' health and physical status and development.

With regards to managerial skills, MrsKehindeKamson, the CEO of Sweet Sensation, a popular fast food chain in Nigeria, in a newspaper interview reiterated that running a fast food business requires responsibility and accountability, and could also be very challenging. She added that being a good employer involves putting in place a permanent structure which continuously embraces the right people and the right kind of services they provide (Daily Sun, 2008).

Having mentioned the above, it would be appropriate to also say that the fast food entrepreneurs should strive to possess these required skills for better product quality and overall performance of their business ventures

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GROWTH OF FAST FOOD IN NIGERIA.

According to Eke (2006) and reported by Olutayo and Akanle (2009), the number of fast food outlets in Nigeria is increasing at a geometric rate and expected to double in five years. This proliferation is not unconnected with the general upsurge in social and economic activities. In 2006, the global fast food market grew by 4.8% and reached a value of 102.4 billion and a volume of 80.3 million transactions (Acs and Storey, 2004; Gwartney, Lawson and Holcombe, 1999; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). It was also reported on April, 19 2010 that sales increase of 3.0% from a year earlier is the largest in the sector since January 2009 (Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

The increasing growth and proliferation of fast food restaurants in Nigeria and globally can be attributed to the ever-increasing demand for its services for consumers to meet and cope with the global fast ways of livelihood (African Business, 2009). Daily increasing workloads and engagements occasioned by rigorous strife and struggles by individuals for survival and proficiency create less time for food preparation at home. Even, it is not unusual for women and married couples to engage in official assignments and duties away from homes, therefore making the consumption of fast food to become a fact of life.

Mrs OlayinkaAdedayo, the President of the Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria (AFFCON) summarized the several factors responsible for the consistent growth of the industry as the:

- general increase in average disposal income of families
- decrease in the cost difference between eating out and cooking at home, and
- increasingly hectic lifestyles of people, which gives less time for home cooking.(www.affcon.com).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES OF FAST FOOD OPERATIONS IN NIGERIA

The bottom line regarding QSRs worldwide is that they exert great influence in determining the physical and mental health status of the populace which they feed daily (Fakokunde, 2011). Therefore food safety concerns and hygiene issues relating to sanitation, contamination and diets have been raised in certain quarters. Whitney and Rolfes (2002) asserted that when a food manufacturer or restaurant chef makes an error, the result may be an epidemic food-borne illness. For instance, in the mid-1990s, when a fast food restaurant served undercooked burgers tainted with the infectious organism called, *Escherichia coli*, hundreds of patrons became ill, and at least three people died. According to Whitney and Rolfes (2002), consumers have concerns about the safety of their food, they want to know what causes food poisoning and they become alarm when they hear of contaminants and pesticides in foods. They therefore wonder whether food additives are safe and are more worried about the availability of clear drinking water. Whitney and Rolfes (2002) therefore summarizes food safety concern to include food-home illness, nutritional adequacy of foods, environmental contaminants, naturally occurring toxicants, pesticide residues and food additives.

Several other studies and investigation have linked the increasing consumption of fast food to excessive body weight, especially in children, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc. As a result, fast food restaurants have been alleged several of promoting excessive calories intake beyond the daily 2000 calories needed by individuals. According to Acs and Storey (2004), the center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2004 ranked obesity as the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States. The attendant effects of all these issues are considered unfavorable to economic growth and development of nations. In 2003, the cost of health care in America increased by \$93 million, mainly from diabetes and heart diseases. All these issues have stimulated increase interests in the promotion of the use and consumption of natural local food and cuisines containing fresh ingredients and unsaturated fats as against fast food choices.

Cases of litigations and health claims filed against fast food owners-operators are also increasing daily. In response to this, stakeholders in the industry are now faced with the need for proper reappraisal and realignment of their operations in line with healthier laid down procedures and guidelines targeted at increasing life expectancy. Mrs. Kamson of Sweet Sensation asserted, that healthy living is an option for who is interested, not to be forced down, and that is why practitioners now strive to offer a very broad food profile (Ariyo, 2005; Raimi and Towobola, 2011).

Nigeria as an emerging economy is not left out of all these developments spreading worldwide. The growth and survival of the industry in the country can be said to be currently challenged by menaces such as:

- Poor infrastructures and lack of basic public utilities.
- Inadequate food processing facilities
- High cost of funds
- Multiple taxation
- Informal practices among others.

Also, because of their attractive and accommodative nature, customers are usually tempted to overuse fast food facilities, turning them into meeting points and relaxation centres. In order to discourage this and as already implemented in the US, This Day (2009) reported that Nigerian government planned to impose tax and reduce indiscriminate consumption of fast food.

The greatest challenge facing the country, according to AFFCON, is unhealthy competition posed by the plethora of the informal sector, which not only eats into the market share of the organized sector, but also threatens public health and the environment.

CONCLUSION

Despite the various challenges faced by fast food operators, which in some cases, leads to eventual withdrawal from and closure of the business, the fast food business still remains one of the most promising ventures, entrepreneurs should not overlook. The emerging opportunities and potential patronages awaiting courageous and bold investors in the industry should not be further delayed and wasted, but adequately matched and harnessed with the possession of adequate skills and knowledge which this paper has succeeded in bringing to the fore.

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