Food consumption patterns in quick service restaurants in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

Objective: This research study aimed to explore Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns in Kinshasa, DRC. The fast food industry is growing in the Congolese capital and understanding consumers is valuable to increase clients’ satisfaction, business development, positive health indicators, and socio cultural acceptance.

Materials and Methods: The sample consisted of Congolese consumers approached by convenience sampling in Kinshasa. The employed research instruments were structured survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews and direct observations. The quantitative data collected were analysed through the use of SPSS.

Results: Findings from this research study first demonstrated that Congolese consumers do have a positive perception of leisure and dining experiences in quick service restaurants in Kinshasa. Food and drinks ordered by the customers are often the most affordable ones on quick service restaurants menus; sandwiches, shawarmas, and/or fried potatoes paired with soft drinks. In terms of culture, foreign foods served in quick service restaurants rarely take into account the eating habits and local culture of the local population. Overall, the whole concept of Western inspired quick service restaurants is gaining in popularity in the Congolese capital, especially among the younger population.

Conclusion: Overall, food and drink menus, guests experience, and profitability in quick service restaurants could surely be all enhanced by adjusting parameters to local realities and consumers’ preferences.

Keywords: Food consumption, Fast food, Restaurant industry, Africa, Kinshasa, Consumer behaviour

Introduction

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are currently no American quick service restaurants established in DRC. McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Subway, Burger King, Starbucks, etc. are simply not present in the country. Major Western quick service restaurant chains did not settle in the DRC yet due to political instability, fluctuating economy, low purchasing power, weak institutions, high levels of corruption, regular power and water shortage, impotent distribution system, excessive import fees and taxes, etc. As of 2017, Western inspired quick service restaurants operating in Kinshasa comprised the giant South African owned Steers and Debonairs Pizza restaurant chains, local quick service restaurant chains consisting of DFC Restaurant rapide, Waz Burger, and Kin Délicieux and independent fast food outlets including Hunga Busta and City Market Fried Chicken (C.F.C).

Despite business growth, there is an absence of knowledge in regards to consumer behaviour and food consumption patterns in developing markets, especially in Africa. However, in spite of the political instability, the quick service restaurant industry has expanded in Kinshasa over the past decade. Regardless of the abundance of street vendors and independent restaurants retailing local food specialties, Western inspired quick service restaurants are expanding to meet modern urban consumers’ needs driven by globalization, curiosity, and consumerism. Western inspired fast food outlets are novel to the population in DRC and should be developed in the future in order for the local
consumers to benefit from it.

Research objectives

(1) To explore the restaurant industry in Kinshasa and study the relationships between demographics and Congolese consumers’ perceptions, intentions, and actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(2) To examine Congolese consumers' perceptions and intentions toward quick service restaurants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and study the relationships affecting the actual behaviour in quick service restaurants, by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviours;

(3) To explore and understand Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns and actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo;

Research hypotheses

H1 Demographics influence Congolese consumers’ perceptions, intentions, and actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo;

H2 Congolese consumers’ perceptions of quick service restaurants in the DRC and their intentions influence the actual behavior in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo;

H3 Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, will differ from the traditional Congolese food consumption patterns and include more processed foods with positive and negative impacts on Congolese consumers’ dietary behavior and leisure experience;

Scope of the research

This research study examines Western inspired quick service restaurants operating in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. For the purpose of this research study, quick service restaurants investigated are limited to: Steers, Debonairs Pizza, Waz Burger, Kin Délicieux, Hunga Busta, DFC Restaurant rapide, and City Market Fried Chicken (C.F.C). Only quick service restaurants retailing, amongst others, burgers, pizzas, fried chicken, fried potatoes, and soft drinks with limited table service are qualified to be included in this research study. Street vendors, coffee shops, ice cream parlours, lounges and bars, full service restaurants, etc. are excluded from this investigation.

Limitations of the research & Basic assumption

This research study was partially conducted by means of retrieving completed questionnaires and interviews, assuming that respondents answered truthfully, from Congolese citizens aged 18 and over and located in Kinshasa during the data collection period. To ensure respondent’s comfort and understanding, the researcher provided the required assistance as objectively as possible. This research study is limited to Congolese consumers that were physically and mentally able and willing to be part of the research study. It is assumed that the sample is not representative of the Congolese population living in Kinshasa.
Research methodology & Data collection procedure

For the purpose of this research study, secondary and primary data, qualitative and quantitative, were used. Quantitative data were aggregated via street sampling in Kinshasa area using a paper-based self-administered structured survey questionnaire from a sample of Congolese respondents aged 18 and over, located in Kinshasa during the data collection period and who already visited one or more quick service restaurants of interest. Quantitative data collected include demographics and Congolese consumers’ perceptions, intentions, and actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, DRC. Qualitative data about Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns in quick service restaurants were also collected. Fieldwork to sample qualitative data includes structured in depth interviews paired with direct observations to explore and understand Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns. Qualitative data collected through interviews consists of Congolese consumers in quick service restaurants in Gombe area, managers of quick service restaurants in Gombe area, nutritionist, medical anthropologist, and former McDonald’s franchisee. Finally, respondents were volunteers who agree to be interviewed to share and discuss about their food consumption patterns in quick service restaurants. Qualitative data collected through observations consists of direct observations of Congolese consumers visiting quick service restaurants in Gombe area. Nearly 500 direct observations took place in January, March, and April 2018 in nine different quick service restaurant locations. Individuals of interest within the Congolese population, namely respondents, were selected based on their suitability and availability for the purpose of this research study. Results may be biased as the population is not homogeneous (Kothari, 2004).

In this research study, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same period, commonly known as parallel data gathering. Convenience sampling were used by the researcher because of a more straightforward access to individuals of interest and due to lack of reliable information regarding population living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the last and only census perpetrated in the country dates from 1984 (Institut National de la Statistique, 2016).

Population & Sample

Based on statistics from the 1980s, the Congolese government made projections and estimates the current total population of Kinshasa to be around 11.85 million inhabitants (Demographia, 2017). Therefore, taking into account a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, the total estimated population of Kinshasa, and a 50% response distribution, the sample size was established at 385 respondents (Raosoft, 2016). Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was selected by the researcher in order to give all residents of interest readily available at the data collection point during the data collection period an equal opportunity to participate in this research study.

Research Findings

Analysis of Demographics

In total, 400 respondents filled out the survey questionnaire in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A total of 242 men (60.5%) and 158 women (39.5%) answered the survey questionnaire. Findings revealed that most respondents (75.8%) were aged between 18 and 35 years old, 13.5% of the respondents were aged between 36 and 45 years old and a minority of the respondents were aged 46 years old or more. Findings revealed that most respondent have stated to be single (64.8%) or married (31.3%). In terms of highest education level achieved, 22.5% of the respondents stated having a high school degree, 33.5% a bachelor degree and 41.3% a graduate degree. In terms of monthly family income, 35.2% of the respondents stated earning USD 200 or less, 27.2% evaluate their monthly income to be between USD 201 and USD 500, 21.2% between USD 501 and USD 1000 and a minority stated having a monthly income higher than USD 1001. 5.3% of the respondents politely refused to share their monthly income for the purpose of this research study. Finally, findings revealed that consumers are employed in different areas of Kinshasa; the majority of the respondents stated to work in the neighbourhood of Gombe, 17.8% stated working outside Gombe in other neighbourhood of Kinshasa, and 27.3% stated not working in Kinshasa.
Analysis of Congolese consumers’ perceptions of quick service restaurants in the DRC

Using the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1990), this section analyses Congolese consumers' perceptions of quick service restaurants regarding attitude, social pressure, and ability to visit quick service restaurants. For the purpose of this research study, attitude toward the behaviour refers to Congolese consumers' attitude toward visiting quick service restaurants. Findings reveals that 79% of the respondents stated that visiting quick service restaurants on a regular basis is tasteful. For most Congolese consumers interviewed, the taste of the food is prominent when visiting a fast food outlet in the city. A Congolese consumer mentioned: “I do visit quick service restaurants because of the taste of the food. If it is not tasty, I simply not go back to that restaurant. The taste of the food is the main purpose of my visit in quick service restaurant”. Western inspired quick service restaurants in Kinshasa also give their customers the impression to be open to the world and give them the opportunity to taste foreign flavours. Visiting those outlets allow Congolese consumers to eat foods they would not be able to cook themselves are home; “Taste is a determining factor in a restaurant, but only for foods that are not usually prepared at home”. Moreover, foods and drinks retail in quick service restaurants are mainly categorized as processed or ultra-processed products which are made by large industrial food companies. Those products appeal to the taste of the consumers with their stimulating proprieties; considerable amounts of fats, sugar, salt, flavour enhancers, etc. Therefore, foods and drinks retails in quick service restaurant in Kinshasa, as per their composition and provenance, are palatable for the consumers. In addition to the food being perceived as tasty, 81.3% of the consumers surveyed mentioned that visiting quick service restaurants on a regular basis is healthy. Congolese consumers, with little knowledge about nutrition, consider tasty foods and drinks to be healthy and part of a balanced diet. The nutritionist interviewed also noted that “Congolese consumers are not well informed about nutrition and healthy eating, which leads them to ignore the consequences of consuming fast food”. Consumers interviewed seem to have a more grounded perception of foods and drinks retailed in fast food outlets. Indeed, they seem to be aware that those products contain considerable amounts of fats and should not be consumed on a regular basis. A male consumer actually said: “The foods contain too much fat and they are not often balanced that we even talk about junk food”. That being mentioned, those products being hygienic give the impression to local consumers that they are also good for the health. Finally, 88% of the respondents answered that visiting quick service restaurants on a regular basis is amusing. Congolese consumers interviewed mainly stated that visiting quick service restaurants in Gombe, Kinshasa, are a way to enjoy life and are part of leisure experiences in the city. They seem to appreciate foreign food and drink products and moments with friends, family and love partners in those outlets. Those consumers also seem to value the time they spend outside of their homes and usual settings to spend time in a restaurant that offers a different atmosphere; “It can only be a beautiful experience to get out of the usual surroundings and the house”. Overall, Congolese consumers’ attitude toward visiting quick service restaurants is positive.

Analysis of Congolese consumers’ actual behaviour in quick service restaurants

For the purpose of this research study, actual behaviour refers to Congolese consumers’ actual visits in quick service restaurants. Firstly, 72.1% of the respondents affirmed visiting quick service restaurants to celebrate special occasions such as birthday, anniversary, graduation, etc. As mentioned previously, quick service restaurants are perceived as the perfect locations by locals to organize special gatherings. Interviewee mentioned liking: “Music and games for children when you go with your family”. In terms of visit frequency, 14% of the respondents visit quick service restaurants once a month or less, 39.3% visit two to four times a month and 45.3% visit five times a month or more. Overall, more than 80% of the consumers surveyed do visit quick service restaurants twice a month or more. A regular consumer affirmed: “I visit fast food restaurants on weekends or after work to grab food to take home”. Those high attendance rates may partially be explained by the fact that very poor Congolese, usually uneducated and unable to understand, speak, or write French were not surveyed and interviewed due to the language barrier. Therefore, Congolese consumers that were surveyed and interviewed may visit quick service restaurants slightly more frequently than the average local in
Kinshasa. In terms of drinks, most respondents surveyed and interviewed mentioned drinking soft drink including Coca-Cola, Fanta, Sprite, Coca-Cola Light, etc., juices, smoothies, and water when visiting quick service restaurants. Only a minority of the respondent drinks tea, coffee, or alcoholic beverages when visiting quick service restaurants. Direct observations demonstrated the same drinking habits and consumers interviewed answered having: “A Coca-Cola or fruit juice with a pizza or shawarma, a meal with meat and fries” and “Shawarma, hamburger and with a soft drink” when visiting quick service restaurants. When Congolese customers visit quick service restaurants, most of them do order and consume what they intended to feast on; sandwiches, shawarmas, and/or fried potatoes paired with soft drinks.

Analysis of the relationships between Demographics and Congolese consumers’ actual behaviour in quick service restaurants

Results of analysis unveil a weak correlation strength (R=0.232) between age group and the actual consumption of soft drink when visiting quick service restaurants. Overall, more than 80% of the respondents aged between 18 and 35 years old affirmed consuming soft drink when visiting quick service restaurant. Congolese consumers in their twenties and early thirties interviewed seemed to have stronger taste and preferences for sweet beverages of all kinds than elderly people. Indeed, most Congolese consumers interviewed mentioned having a soft drink, often Coca-Cola, or a sweetened beverage when visiting fast food restaurants. It is to be noted, regardless of the consumers’ age, that soft drink consumption is considerable.

Results of analysis present a moderate correlation strength (R=0.336) between age group and the actual consumption of tea / coffee when visiting quick service restaurants. Overall, less than 10% of the respondents aged between 18 and 35 years old as compared with 47.62% of the respondents aged 56 years old or more affirmed consuming tea / coffee when visiting quick service restaurant. Congolese consumers observed in fast food outlets, regardless of their age, usually add between 10 and 20 grams of sugar in their hot beverages. As a result, it can be concluded that Congolese consumers aged 56 or more, namely elderly people, do have greater consumption of sweetened tea / coffee than younger consumers when visiting quick service restaurants.

Results of analysis unveil a weak correlation strength (R=0.233) between age group and the actual consumption of fried potatoes when visiting quick service restaurants. Overall, more than 85% of the respondents aged between 18 and 25 years old and more than 70% of the respondents aged between 26 and 35 years old affirmed consuming fried potatoes when visiting quick service restaurants. A twenty-five years old consumer interviewed also stated: “I like fried potatoes, without even knowing why!”. It is to be noted that, regardless of the consumers’ age, fried potatoes consumption is considerable. As a result, it can be concluded that Congolese consumers aged 18 to 35, namely young adult age groups, do have higher consumption of fried potatoes than older consumers when visiting quick service restaurants.

Overall, it can be concluded that demographics including gender, age group, marital status, level of education, travel outside DRC, family income, and working neighbourhood, only weakly influence Congolese consumers' actual behaviour when visiting quick service restaurants including visit purpose, visit frequency, and actual beverage / food consumption as the urban Congolese population as more or less the same fast food preferences.

Analysis of the relationships between intentions and actual behaviour in quick service restaurants

Analysis presented strong and very strong correlations between Congolese consumers' intentions toward quick service restaurants (visit purpose, visit frequency, and beverage / food intentions of consumption) and Congolese consumers' actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe, Kinshasa (All correlation coefficients ranging between 0.671 and 0.862). Indeed, Congolese consumers' intentions regarding visit purpose and visit frequency correlate with their actual visit purpose and visit frequency in quick service restaurants. For example, a consumer who intend to visit quick service restaurants to celebrate a birthday will most probably visit quick service restaurants to
celebrate a birthday. Moreover, Congolese consumers’ intentions in regards to drink / food consumption when visiting quick service restaurants correlate with their actual drink / food consumption when visiting quick service restaurants. Overall, Congolese consumers' intentions toward quick service restaurants statistically significantly predict Congolese consumers' actual behaviour in quick service restaurants in Gombe, Kinshasa (All Coefficient of determination range between .451 and .743).

Results of analysis show a moderate correlation strength (R=0.342) between Congolese consumers’ intention to eat fried chicken and Congolese consumers’ actual consumption of combo (burger or fried chicken with fried potatoes, and soft drink) when visiting quick service restaurants. Overall, nearly 10% of the consumers who mentioned having the intention to eat fried chicken when visiting quick service restaurant actually consumed a combo meal when visiting the outlet. As a result, it can be concluded that Congolese consumers’ intention to eat fried chicken when visiting quick service restaurant influence at some point the consumption of combo as it may be perceived by the consumer as a good deal with significant value for money. Congolese consumers observed in quick service restaurants ordered and feast on a combo including fried chicken, fried potatoes and soft drink. Those food items remain, however, quite pricy for the vast majority of the Congolese population.

Analysis of Congolese consumers’ food consumption patterns in quick service restaurants

Most fast food outlets in Kinshasa opened a few years ago, are located in Gombe area and operate daily from morning until late in the evening. The concepts of those establishments are obviously inspired by Western quick service restaurants but with a light African twist in regards to the menu. It was noted that Congolese consumers seem to be pressured by their peers to visit quick service restaurants to celebrate special occasions as those outlets are perceived to be the perfect locations to organize birthdays, anniversaries, and graduation parties, etc. with amusing atmosphere, easy booking, cake and music. Consumers interviewed stated feeling pressured by: “Friends and family”, “Girlfriend to please her” and “Relatives such as nieces and cousins”. Actual reliable visit frequency is slightly harder to measure through survey, observation demonstrated that some privileged Congolese consumers seem to be able to visit quick service regularly; twice a month or more. Most consumers visiting those outlets are Congolese aged between 20 and 45 years old. Adults with kids are rarely seen in the restaurant on week days but family gatherings are more frequent during the weekend. Some clients bring their computers or have business meetings in the dining halls. Office workers of the area also visit the restaurant during lunch breaks. Utensils are sometimes used, no matter of the food ordered, including burger or pizza. It was noted that most Congolese consumers are more interested in food quantity than food quality as they are looking for tasty foodstuffs that will fill them up. Consumers interviewed, in regards to their eating in quick service restaurants, mentioned: “Yes, I eat a lot”. Shawarma paired with a soft drink is a popular combination. It was also demonstrated that when Congolese customers visit quick service restaurants, most of them do order and consume what they intended to feast on; sandwiches, shawarmas, and/or fried potatoes paired with soft drinks. Fried chicken, slightly more expensive, is also quite a popular food option. Combos including a burger/fried chicken, fried potatoes, and a drink are available in most fast food outlets. Most clients, regardless of the food items eaten, will accompany their meal with mashed pimiento pili-pili, mayonnaise and ketchup. Service attitude in most of those outlets is not customer oriented like most establishments in the western world. Quick service restaurants consumers are mainly looking for a comfortable setting including modern furniture and air conditioning, to relax for an hour or two while sipping on a soft drink. Orders to take away and home deliveries are also common. It was observed that Congolese are still attached to their traditional diets and adopt gradually, when they can afford it, a Western diet and lifestyle.

Summary, conclusion & recommendations

Summary and conclusions of demographic factors

In total, 400 respondents filled out the survey questionnaire, 30 respondents were interviewed and nearly 500 direct observations of Congolese consumers were made in regards to quick service
restaurants in Gombe area, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Most of the respondents who answered the survey questionnaire were single, males, and/or aged between 18 and 35 years old. Consumers of quick service restaurants tend to be privileged: employed, slightly wealthier and usually more educated than the average Congolese person. Some of them also stated previous travel outside of the DRC. Those characteristics correspond to the demographics of Congolese consumers observed when visiting quick service restaurants. Wearing semi-casual outfits including colorful shirts with jeans or pants, customers of quick service restaurants came alone, in couple or in small groups. They may visit quick service restaurants to have a quick meal during their lunch break, to handle business meetings or do computer work of all kinds, to celebrate a special occasion on weekends with family or love partner, etc. Customers visiting fast food outlets stand out from the general population in the DRC by what is perceived to be higher living standards and outstanding demographic profile.

Summary and conclusions of research objectives and hypothesis

Relationships between Demographics and Congolese consumers’ actual behaviour in quick service restaurants

The most relevant correlations were observed between age group and Congolese consumers’ actual consumption of soft drink or their consumption of sweetened tea / coffee when visiting quick service restaurants in Gombe, Kinshasa. Overall, age group statistically significantly predicts the drink consumption when visiting fast food outlets. As a result, it can be concluded that young consumers do ingest considerable amounts of added sugars through soft drinks and older Congolese consumers do consume substantial quantity of added sugars through sweetened tea / coffee. Finally, research findings unveil a weak correlation between age group and the actual consumption of fried potatoes when visiting quick service restaurants. However, regardless of the consumers’ age, fried potatoes consumption is considerable.

Congolese consumers’ perceptions and intentions towards quick service restaurants; the study of relationships affecting the actual behaviour in quick service restaurants by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviours

Findings reveals that Congolese consumers mainly believe that quick service restaurants provide foreign tasty and healthy foods in an amusing atmosphere. Overall, most consumers surveyed and interviewed believe that visiting quick service restaurants regularly is accepted, encouraged and sometimes expected by their peers; family, friends, partners, co-workers, etc. Findings also revealed that visiting quick service restaurants may be perceived as financially accessible by privileged Congolese consumers, even for those with limited disposable income, as some food and drink items are retailed at affordable prices. Moreover, most respondents believe that visiting quick service restaurants on a regular basis is completely up to them and with more disposable income they would increase their visit frequency. Finally, attitude towards quick service restaurants is positive, the social pressure Congolese consumers perceive is considerable and visiting fast food outlets is somewhat in their control; having greater financial means would only increase their desire and ability to visit those establishments.

Congolese consumers’ actual behaviour in quick service restaurants

Analysis demonstrated that quick service restaurants offer various dishes and culinary varieties, but very few are known to the people of Kinshasa. This can be explained by the cost of the proposed food and drink options, the cultural barrier and physical accessibility. Therefore, quick service restaurants’ attendance is mainly limited to the inhabitants with disposable income of the covered areas and the people working in the city centre. Overall, the whole concept of Western inspired quick service restaurants is gaining in popularity in the Congolese capital, especially among the younger population.
Discussion On Literature Review And Research Findings

Research findings and recent literature support that consumers are not only looking to feed themselves when visiting a fast food outlet, but are also looking for an entertaining and memorable experience. Multinational fast food chains are not implanted in DRC yet due to the fluctuating and unreliable political, economic, operational, and social conditions of the country. However, partial political stability, economic development, Congolese’ curiosity towards foreign fast foods encouraged private investors to open independent Western inspired quick service restaurants in Kinshasa, DRC. Most of them mainly retail processed foods and drinks. As restaurants and entertainment are profitable industries, fast food outlets emerged in the city centre Gombe and competition is now fierce.

References


