

## ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY OF RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT

Miyene Charles Tom

Department of Marketing, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

Creating positive experiences around consumers enhance the value of service offerings which could be utilized as a differentiation strategy in a highly competitive retail business. The growing body of knowledge in the academic space suggests that creating pleasant experiences to customers in shopping is strategic in gaining high purchase. Hence, Atmosphere has become an important consideration in assessing service delivery from the customers' point of view because it influences repurchase behaviour and the cognitive, emotional and psychological status of the customer. Despite the growing concern of this subject in marketing research, it has not been wholesomely exhausted in marketing practice. This work seeks to validate empirically, while analyzing the influence of eatery atmosphere on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This study adopted quantitative research design using a survey method. The study comprised of twenty-five (25) registered restaurants outlets in Port Harcourt. A total of 150 customers in the frame of six (6) respondents from each restaurant were surveyed through questionnaire administration. Six research questions were posed and six hypotheses tested. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the stated hypothesis in SPSS version 25 which was used to correlate data on the independent and dependent variables of the study. The findings from the Pearson product moment correlation analysis result reveal a significant relationship between ambient factor, design factor, social factor and customer loyalty in repeat purchase and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study concludes that eatery atmosphere influences on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent. The study therefore recommends that the restaurants in Port Harcourt should install necessary ambient elements such as décor, temperature, scent, lighting, color and delightful music and consistently maintaining them for optimal functionalities. The restaurants in Port Harcourt should adopt latest global designs in complex decoration and maintaining both internal and external facilities that provide customer comfort. The restaurants in Port Harcourt should reduce overcrowding by providing adequate number of dining tables and maintaining minimum number of sales persons.

**KEYWORDS:** Atmospheric Conditions, Customer Loyalty, Restaurants, Port Harcourt

### INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction occupies the front burner of every service provision institution be it private, corporate or public since a satisfied customer is a loyal customer. Business organizations around the

world anticipate productivity through provision of comfort in its entirety. Eateries as a crucial service industry maximize atmospheric elements within its operational terrain to capture customer loyalty hence atmosphere becomes an important consideration in assessing any service delivery from the point of view of customers. Lin (2010) discussed that atmosphere is important because it influences repurchase behaviour and the cognitive, emotional and psychological status of the customer.

Eatery atmosphere had received considerable definitions from scholars. Baker (1987) defined service atmosphere as 'physical environment, (Turley and Milliman, 2000) see it as 'marketing environment', (Arnold et al., 1996) considered it as 'economic environment', (Mathwick et al., 2001) discussed it as 'interactive field', Weinrach (2000) says its 'environmental psychology', to (Hutton and Richardson, 1995) it is 'healthscapes' and by (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003) atmosphere is seen as 'social servicescape' (Oktay, 2016). Conversely, Kotler (1973) defines atmosphere as 'the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance purchase probability'. According to him the main sensory channels for atmosphere are sight, sound, scent and touch. Additionally, in the discussions by Bogicevic (2014), (Turley and Milliman, 2000) eatery atmosphere is thus referred to as incorporation of tangible and intangible environmental features such as music, colour, brightness and furnishings into the service environment.

In a similar examination Bitner (1992) categorized service atmosphere in dimensions of environmental conditions spatial order and functionality and symbols, signs and artifacts. He further explained that environmental conditions are such elements as illumination, colour and scent, spatial order and functionality denote the appropriate arrangement of furnishings and materials; signs, symbols and artifacts are the elements through which people interact with a given environment, (Liu & Jang, 2009). In another exploratory study Heide and Grønhaug (2009) categorized atmosphere-related elements into four groups; distinctiveness, hospitability, relaxation and refinement, based on guests' perceptions. In the present study, eatery atmosphere is measured with the dimension of ambient factor, design factor and social factors.

Ambient factors are those that affect the atmosphere of the environment, such as color, sound, lighting, and scent. People consume a meal with all five senses; sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Sight gives information about color and appearance, and is of great importance for our perception of taste, smell and texture of the meal, but the surroundings of the meal also affect our perception (Gustaffson et al., 2006). The design factors consists of the décor and interior design of an eatery this can be seen in architecture color style, material décor, scale shapes, texture pattern, layout, comfort, signage, accessories and the social factors which are those factors affect attitudes and activities, (Bradley, 2009). It could be seen as people in the environment in number, appearance and behavior.

Gaining customer loyalty has become a primary concern to marketers across the globe such that different marketing approaches had been adopted including service atmosphere. This was maintained by Ryuand (2011) that atmosphere has become an important factor in customer loyalty, revenue-increasing efforts and in maintaining market share. It has been well established that customer loyalty has an important role in the success of businesses and, due to this importance it has received a considerable attention, (YooandBai, 2013). Customer loyalty matters not only in creating loyal customers but also in gaining sustainable competitive advantage (Mandhachitara and Poolthong, 2011). Customer loyalty is measured with repeat purchase and customer referral in this literature. Repeat purchase is the purchase by a consumer of a same-brand product as bought on a previous occasion while referral occurs when others tell each other about a business or product.

Service atmosphere has received enormous discussion in the academic space following its influence of customers' satisfaction, purchase behavior etc. however customer loyalty in repeat purchase and referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt, Nigeria has not been measured using service atmosphere factors of ambient, design and social factors. Against this backdrop, this study is conducted to examine the influence of eatery atmosphere on consumer loyalty of restaurant in Port Harcourt.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The concept behind opening a restaurant is to provide quality food for a variety to its customers. However, with the drastic change in the eating out trend customers look for more than the quality of food in a restaurant. They expect restaurants to provide them with the ambiance of comfort, quality and high standard (Horng et al., 2013). The influence of atmospherics in marketing contexts is based on the premise that the design of an environment through a variety of means including: lighting, layout, sound, colour, and temperature etc, could stimulate perceptual and emotional responses in consumers and affect their behaviours (Kotler, 1973). However, the operation of atmospheric factors in restaurants has marred with issues and concerns that left customer dissatisfaction at its wakes.

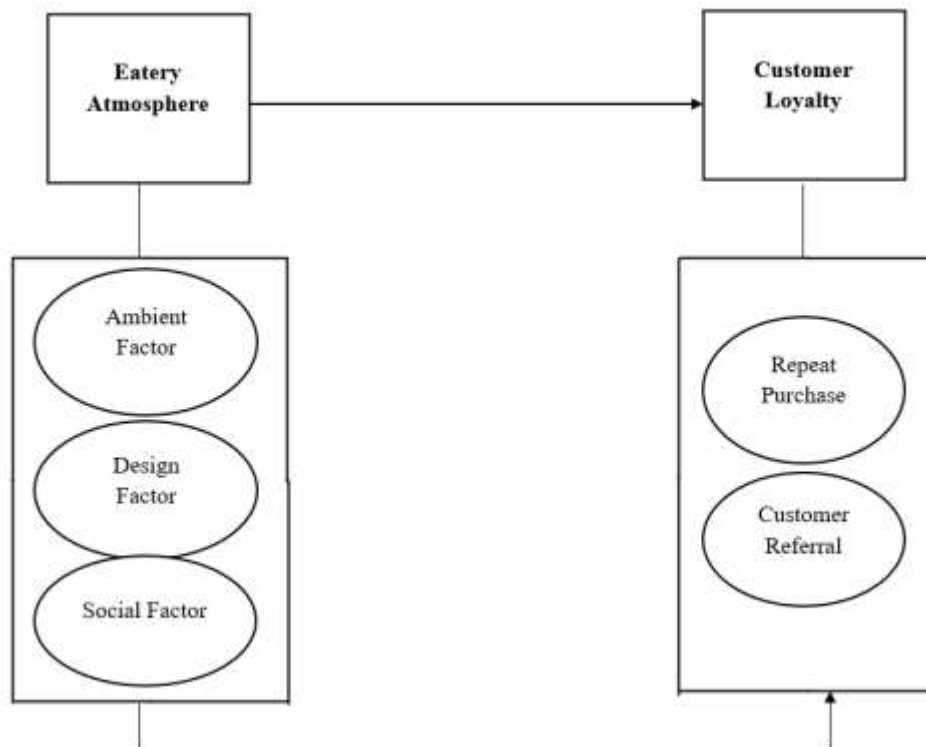
Spies et al., (1997) insist that poor interior design leads to degradation of buying emotion and increase in stress in the shopper. More specifically, certain interior design cues such as signage and colour can affect customer's emotions and cognitive evaluations in terms of perceiving merchandise, service quality and efficiency of the store (Singh 2006). In examining sound in shopping outlets, some studies found that customer mood and cognition can be badly affected by the music in shopping centre, (Stratton, 1992). Regarding social factors, (Machleit et al. 2000), (Mattila and Wirtz 2008) have indicated that when the store is extremely crowded or extremely under-crowded, customers seem to be unhappy. In a similar study, (Mattila & Wirtz 2008) observed that perceived crowding has a negative effect on unplanned buying, as van (Dolen et al. 2002), and (Machleit et al. 2005) claimed that perceived crowding seems to have a negative influence on customers' behaviours and responses leading to a decrease of purchases by customers which was upheld by (Machleit et al., 2005) that

overcrowding has a negative correlation with customer satisfaction.

A number of atmospheric factors had found a negative influence on customer loyalty even at its best application basically because of divergent taste within the consumers. It became even more controversial when Bitner (1990) noted that with unprofessional dress, customers can easily become dissatisfied, especially when they experience mistakes or failures and was supported by Kim et al. (2010) who found a link between employees’ appearance, such as staff uniform or the presence of non-verbal cues and customer’s purchases and satisfaction. Application of atmospheric factors in the eateries and restaurants in Port Harcourt is undeniable evident in the sighting of colour lights, music, comforts and other factors within the industry primarily to gaining customer loyalty but how well this object has been achieved is still unclear. As Lam (2001) pointed out, although a large number of studies have been carried out, there is still a gap in literature on the influence of eatery atmosphere on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt sought to be filled by this research.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this study is shown in figure 1.1 below:



**Source:** Review of Literature: Dimensions of Eatery Atmosphere adopted from (Baker, 1987, as cited in Bohl, 2012).

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of eatery atmosphere on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. To determine the extent to which ambient factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
2. To determine the extent to which ambient factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
3. To examine the extent to which design factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
4. To examine the extent to which design factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
5. To investigate the extent to which social factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
6. To investigate the extent to which social factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

### **Research Question**

The following research questions are posed in the study:

1. To what extent does ambient factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
2. To what extent does ambient factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
3. To what extent does design factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
4. To what extent does design factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
5. To what extent does social factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
6. To what extent does social factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

### **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses tested in this study are stated thus:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ambient factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ambient factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between design factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant relationship between design factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant relationship between social factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant relationship between social factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Concept of Eatery Atmosphere

Kotler(1973) defined atmospherics as the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability. The main sensory channels for atmosphere are sight, sound, scent and touch (Kotler, 1973). In a review of the atmospherics literature, (Turley and Milliman 2000) designated a general interior atmospherics category which includes music, sound, lighting, scent, colour, temperature (often referred to as ambient environmental cues), and visual design elements. The influence of atmospherics in marketing contexts is based on the premise that the design of an environment through a variety of means including lighting, layout, sound, colour, and temperature could stimulate perceptual and emotional responses in consumers and affect their behaviours,(Hashim et al 2010).

### Dimensions of Eatery Atmosphere

#### Ambient Factor

Ambient factors are background conditions in the environment that relate to non-visual elements of a store's environment, (Shahrulliza et al., 2014). According to (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003), the ambient conditions in a restaurant include the background characteristics of the restaurant environment such as interior decoration, exterior appearance, room temperature, lighting, music, noise and smell. Ryu and Jang (2007) found that ambience (e.g. music, temperature and aroma) and employee appearance had the most important influence on customers' emotional responses, which in turn affected customers post-dining behavior and intentions. When shoppers exceed an acceptable range, such as when the lighting becomes too bright or the music too loud, they may notice ambient factors in the store. Both display and in-store lighting help create the proper image and also draw shoppers' eyes around the store, onto merchandise and ultimately encourage them to purchase the product (Chain Store Age, June 2003:78).

#### Design Factor

The store design factor comprised of physical elements of the store including exterior features (parkings), general interior features (floor coverings, color), store layout features (floor space allocation) and interior display features (signage), (Fiore and Kim, 2007). For many shoppers, the shopping goal is convenience, which includes getting in and out of the store quickly and finding the merchandise they seek easily. Hence, layout is a store design cue that influence shoppers' expectations of their efficient movement through a store (Titus and Everett, 1995).

### **Social Factor**

Social factors are those that affect attitudes and activities. Successful restaurant design involves the understanding of these activities and how individuals react to these social factors. Human beings are social creatures and naturally seek the company of others. People view empty restaurants as unpopular and choose to seek a more social and comfortable environment (Robson, 1999). The social factor has been investigated in terms of other customers' presence in the store, as exemplified by crowding research (Harrell et al., 1980). An atmosphere that creates a high level of arousal is likely to be more interesting to shoppers, thus they may stay longer in the store. Retailers may benefit when shoppers stay longer because they may purchase more (Milliman, 1986). The greater the number of store employees, the more active and arousing the store atmosphere.

### **Concept of Customer Loyalty**

It has been well established for years that customer loyalty has an important role in the success of businesses which has received a considerable attention as a research topic since the 1990s (Yoo and Bai, 2013). Customer loyalty matters not only in creating loyal customers but also in gaining sustainable competitive advantage (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011). Loyalty, in a general sense, 'is something that consumers may exhibit to brands, services, stores, product categories and activities' (Uncles et al 2003). Customer loyalty is defined as repurchase or revisit of a given service or product and emotional commitment to a service or product (Yoo&Bai, 2013). This was affirmed by Oliver (1997) that customer loyalty is the deeply held commitment to re-patronise a preferred product despite situational influences and rivals. In this literature customer loyalty is seen in repeat purchase and customer referral.

### **Repeat Purchase**

A repeat purchase is the purchase by a consumer of a same-brand product as bought on a previous occasion. A repeat purchase is an indicator of a degree of customer loyalty to a brand. It is also an opportunity for marketers to establish long-term customer relationships. A high number of repeat purchases indicate a satisfied and "well-retained" customer, which reduces new-customer acquisition costs and increases overall profitability. The more positive the relationship between the customer and the company is, the more often the customer buys products from the company which in turn influences the company's turnover positively. This is in agreement with sales-adjusted retention suggested as measure of customer patronage. (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) agreed that the consumers' purchase behaviour is an essential index to predict consumer behaviour as a subjective attachment to the product.

### **Customer Referral**

Customer referral is the method of promoting products or services to new customers through word of mouth. Such referrals often happen spontaneously but businesses can influence this through

appropriate strategies such as adopting atmospheric elements. Referral involves spreading the word about a product or service through a business' existing customers, rather than traditional advertising. Word-of-mouth marketing, which occurs when others tell each other about a business, is also considered a form of referral marketing. Word-of-mouth is the principle behind things that “go viral. In the view of (Oliver, 1997, as cited in Amankwe 2013) submitted that positive word of mouth recommendation is an outcome of customer retention which improves customer patronage. He maintained that customers who are satisfied with the service of a company will not only stay with the company but will become apostles as well as advocate of the company, thereby recommending the company to other people.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Mehrabian-Russell (PAD) Theory**

The PAD theory by Mehrabian and (1974) is based on the scale that integrates three (3) independent emotions designed to capture information concerning the pleasure, arousal and dominance dimensions. PAD is best used when a researcher is interested in measuring emotional responses to environmental stimuli, (Noreldzaihan et al., 2016). The scale has wideranging bipolar applications to assess consumer reactions towards products, services, and shopping environments which appeals to customer emotion. Phelps, Ling, and Carrasco (2006) maintain that emotion influences customer perception. This measurement scale presents a more accurate way in assessing emotions in respond to product, services and shopping atmosphere (Soriano and Foxall, 2006).

In examining service environment, (Klaus and Maklan., 2012) introduced customers' service experience (EXQ) scale that comprises four dimensions namely product experience, outcome focus, moments of truth, and peace of mind. This measurement combines both cognitive and affective ingredients which found atmospheric experience as an overall emotion perception by customers. A study by (Mathur et al., 1997) confirmed that although cognitive factors may largely account for store selection and for most planned purchases within the store, the atmosphere in the store and the emotional states of shoppers are the important determinants of purchase behavior. This study integrates PAD theory with dimensions of ambient factor, design factor and social factor adopted from Baker (1987) to examine the influence of atmosphere on customer loyalty in Port Harcourt. The PAD theory by Mehrabian and R. (1974) explained the influence of eatery atmosphere on customer emotion which consequently leads positive response in loyalty hence was considered appropriate for the study.

### **Empirical Review**

Dylan et al (2016) investigated the influence of restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction at Pondok Hijau restaurant Manado. The purposive sampling technique was adopted. This research used a quantitative method that formed from the respondent responses by a questionnaire. The sample consists of 100 respondents. Multiple regression analysis method was used. Findings



revealed that there is a simultaneous effect between restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction at PondokHijau Restaurant Manado. It was recommend that it is important to improve the restaurant ambience indicators which are design interior, cleanliness and restaurant concept especially for the cleanliness at PondokHijau Restaurant Manado. The study by Dylan et al., (2016) adopted one of the dimensions of the present study ambient factor which is relational to the present study. By examining restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction, the study reveals a positive relationship between ambient factor and customer satisfaction which support the finding made in the present research.

Shahrulliza et al., (2014) conducted a research titled, unleashing the effect of store atmospherics on hedonic experience and store loyalty in Malaysia. The study adopted the descriptive research design. 50 respondents were randomly selected for the study. The questionnaire survey was used for data collection. The study involves hypothesis testing because it aims to investigate the effects of the independent variables (store atmospherics elements) on hedonic experience and subsequently testing the relationship of hedonic experience on store loyalty. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesized relationships among the variables. The findings demonstrate that the ambient factors do not significantly affect the shoppers' hedonic experience. It was also revealed that store design and social factors of the store atmospherics shown significant results. The study recommends that MPH management should focus on the three factors in order to improve the level of shoppers' hedonic experience. While the study by Shahrulliza et al., (2014) focuses store atmospherics on hedonic experience and store loyalty in Malaysia, the present study is concern about eatery atmosphere on customer loyalty in Port Harcourt. The studies are both correlational, but with different analytical tools.

Oktay (2016) carried out a study on the relationship between service atmosphere and customer loyalty with specific reference to structural equation modeling. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between service atmosphere and customer loyalty in Antalya, Turkey. The study adopted the descriptive research design. A questionnaire survey was employed to collect data from 485 respondents. Data were analyzed through a Structural Equation Model. The results of the study revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the internal and external components of a hotel atmosphere and customer factors. The study by Oktay (2016) relates the present study by examining service atmosphere on customer loyalty. Its finding reveals a positive relationship between the considerable variables which is significant to the present study findings however while the study by Oktay (2016) was conducted in Turkey the present study was done in Port Harcourt.

### **Gap in Literature**

Various studies conducted on service atmosphere had examined customer satisfaction, customer purchase behavior, customer loyalty etc. here in Nigeria and in different countries of the world in

contributing to the body of knowledge in advancing marketing practices. Such works include; the research by (Dylan et al., 2016) who investigated the influence of restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction in Japan, also the study by Shahrulliza et al., (2014) on the effect of store atmospherics on hedonic experience and store loyalty in Malaysia and also the work by Oktay (2016) on the relationship between service atmosphere and customer loyalty in Antalya. Literatures had been exhausted in contents and variables on this subject in the academic space, not much have been explored here in Port Harcourt which constitutes a gap sought to be filled by this research. This study therefore investigates the influence of eatery atmosphere and customer loyalty of restaurant in Port Harcourt.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, this kind of survey is that in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describe certain features of the sample as they are, at the time of the study, (Paul and Usman, 2016). The population of the study consists of customers 25 restaurants registered with Rivers State branch of Association of Fast Food and Confectioners of Nigeria (AFFCON) as at March, 2020. There will be no need for sample size since the entire population will be studied. A total of 150 customers in the frame of six (6) respondents from each restaurant were surveyed through questionnaire administration. The questionnaire was divided into three sections involving questions relating to respondents' profile, questions relating to eatery atmosphere dimensions and questions relating to customer loyalty's measures. The items that were used to measure the variables in this study were based on theory and largely drawn from the literature. The instrument for data collection contains 24 questions for the independent variable and 10 questions for the dependent variables.

The instrument is titled: "Influence of Eatery Atmosphere on Customer Loyalty of Restaurants Questionnaire" (IEACLRQ). The (IEACLRQ) has a four point Likert scale ranging from (Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 making it a total of 10 points divide by 4 = 2.5) was used as a benchmark for decision. Responses below 2.5 were considered not significant, while 2.5 and above were deemed significant. Specifically, eatery atmosphere was measured by ambient factor, design factor and social as adopted from (Baker, 1987, Bohl, 2012). The questions were pre-tested for comprehension, relevance of completeness and validity through 50 eatery customers and five scholars in the field of entrepreneurial marketing.

The pilot survey participants were asked to identify inadequate content of the questionnaire and their response formed the bases for improving upon the final copies. Cronbach alpha was calculated to confirm the reliability of the study construct. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87 which exceeded the rule of thumb cut-off mark of 0.70 as suggested by Hatcher, (1994, as cited in Amadi and Wali 2017). The data generated were analyzed using mean standard deviation scores to answer the

four (4) research questions. To determine the extent of significance that exists between the independent and dependent variables at 0.05 level of significance, the researcher used a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the stated hypotheses while SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 25.0 was used to correlate the data on the independent and dependent variables of the study.

**RESULT OF FINDINGS**

**Research Question 1**

To what extent does ambient factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table1: Computation of Mean Responses of Ambient Factor on Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AMBIENT FACTOR AND REPEAT PURCHASE	150	3.6154	.33976	.01781
Using color in the restaurants does not only affect customer’s perceptions and attitudes but also elicit biological responses leading to repeat purchase.	150	3.68	.645	.034
Restaurants can get a strong customer response in terms of repeat buying based on color, smell, temperature and music.	150	3.83	.405	.021
Customers maintain restaurants that use background music to soften the atmosphere in creating memorable emotional experience around customers.	150	3.49	.682	.036
The additional stimulation that scent provides in the restaurants can add to arousal levels, which can influence the desire to stay more.	150	3.46	.732	.038

Source: SPSS Output, (2020)

Analysis in table 1 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of ambient factor influence on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.61, the respondents confirmed that the influence of ambient factor on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

**Research Question 2**

To what extent does ambient factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table2: Computation of Mean Responses of Ambient Factor on Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std.	
			Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AMBIENT FACTOR AND CUSTOMER REFERRAL	150	3.8008	.30744	.01611
Colors, sounds, smell, and textures in restaurants environment directly arouse visceral reactions that contribute favorably to eating behavior and referral.	150	3.73	.594	.031
Warm colors Incorporated into the restaurant's décor to attract customers, make food appear more appetizing, and increases referral attitude.	150	3.85	.475	.025
Background music in restaurants increase customer spending and encourage referral of close relatives.	150	3.81	.404	.021
Scents in the restaurants does not only create pleasant atmosphere by transferring emotions from other contexts and experiences to the sphere of the service provider but also provokes referral.	150	3.81	.481	.025

Source: SPSS output, (2020)

Analysis in table 2 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of ambient factor influence on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.80, the respondents confirmed that the influence of ambient factor on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

### Research Question 3

To what extent does design factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table 3: Computation of Mean Responses of Design Factor on Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
				Mean
DESIGN FACTOR AND REPEAT PURCHASE	150	3.6703	.27619	.01448
Visual clues such as architecture and other exterior features used by restaurants in Port Harcourt are highly appealing and satisfying.	150	3.81	.413	.022
Physical comfort in the waiting areas of restaurants enhances overall customer satisfaction and encourages repeat-patronage intentions.	150	3.59	.625	.033
The way the restaurants in Port Harcourt express physical characteristics, helps create an expectation of the dining experience even before the customer is served.	150	3.56	.671	.035
The physical layout and internal structure of restaurants in Port Harcourt drives emotions and therefore influence repeat purchase behavior.	150	3.72	.540	.028

Source: SPSS Output, (2020)

Analysis in table 3 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of design factor influence on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.67, the respondents confirmed that the influence of design factor on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

**Research Question 4**

To what extent does design factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table 4: Computation of Mean Responses of Design Factor on Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DESIGN FACTOR AND CUSTOMER REFERRAL	150	3.6202	.31186	.01635
My most patronized restaurant has the right combination of sizes of tables which maximize seating capacity therefore encouraging me to always bring friends along.	150	3.81	.473	.025
Restaurants in Port Harcourt uses architecture and exterior design factors as initial contact with	150	3.81	.404	.021
Exterior cues not only identify a restaurant but more importantly, they define its type, style, and atmosphere.	3150	3.77	.546	.029
Most restaurants in Port Harcourt rely on exterior visual clues that are usually recognizable at a long distance to sustain referral.	150	3.08	.795	.042

Source: SPSS output, (2020)

Analysis in table 4 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of design factor influence on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.62, the respondents confirmed that the influence of design factor on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

**Research Question 5**

To what extent does social factor influence repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table 5: Computation of Mean Responses of Social Factor on Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SOCIAL FACTOR AND REPEAT PURCHASE	150	3.6978	.31659	.01659
The restaurants in Port Harcourt maintain minimum number of customers to avoid crowd and encourage repeat purchase.	150	3.81	.514	.027
The present day restaurants in Port Harcourt served not only as a place for purchasing foods but also as a place for meeting friends for socializing.	150	3.80	.455	.024
The restaurants in Port Harcourt avoid concentration of large number of employees which create sense of security within customer.	150	3.46	.732	.038
An atmosphere that arouses customer interest can be created in the restaurants by reducing crowd and maintaining suitable number of customer in shopping.	150	3.72	.540	.028

Source: SPSS output, (2020)

Analysis in table 5 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of social factor influence on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.69, the respondents confirmed that the influence of social factor on repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

### Research Question 6

To what extent does social factor influence customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt?

**Table 6: Computation of Mean Responses of Social Factor on Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt (N= 150).**

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SOCIAL FACTOR AND CUSTOMER REFERRAL	150	3.5302	.33420	.01752
The greater the number of store employees, the more active and arousing the store atmosphere is in encouraging referral.	150	3.56	.565	.030
Waiters and waitresses' professional conducts in Port Harcourt restaurants are adequate in encouraging customer referral.	150	3.08	.795	.042
The employees in restaurants in Port Harcourt made customer experience more memorable than just feeding experience.	150	3.73	.594	.031
Perceived value created by the human components of restaurants in Port Harcourt surpassed my previous experience in other cities of Nigeria.	150	3.75	.524	.027

Source: SPSS output, (2020)

Analysis in table 6 showed that all questionnaire items have mean score above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating an acceptance of social factor influence on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. In summary, with a grand mean of 3.53, the respondents confirmed that the influence of social factor on customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between ambient factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 7: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Ambient Factor and Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis.**

Correlations		REPEAT PURCHASE	AMBIENT FACTOR
<b>REPEAT PURCHASE</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
<b>AMBIENT FACTOR</b>	Pearson Correlation	.931**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)

The result in table 7 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.931. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a very strong relationship between ambient factor and repeat purchase. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that ambient factor positively relates repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in ambient factor would likely increase repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant relationship between ambient factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt", and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between ambient factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 8: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Ambient Factor and Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis****Correlations**

		CUSTOMER REFERRAL	AMBIENT FACTOR
<b>CUSTOMER REFERRAL</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.848**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
<b>AMBIENT FACTOR</b>	Pearson Correlation	.848**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)

The result in table 8 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.848. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a very strong relationship between ambient factor and customer referral. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that ambient factor positively relates customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in ambient factor would likely increase customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant relationship between ambient factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt”, and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

**Hypothesis 3**

There is no significant relationship between design factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 9: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Design Factor and Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis.****Correlations**

		REPEAT PURCHASE	DESIGN FACTOR
<b>REPEAT PURCHASE</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
<b>DESIGN FACTOR</b>	Pearson Correlation	.679**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)



The result in table 9 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.679. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a strong relationship between design factor and repeat purchase. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that design factor positively relates repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in design factor would likely increase repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant relationship between design factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt”, and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

**Hypothesis 4**

There is no significant relationship between design factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 10: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Design Factor and Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis.**

**Correlations**

		CUSTOMER REFERRAL	DESIGN FACTOR
<b>CUSTOMER REFERRAL</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.780**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
<b>DESIGN FACTOR</b>	Pearson Correlation	.780**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)

The result in table 8 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.780. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a very strong relationship between design factor and customer referral. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that design factor positively relates customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in design factor would likely increase customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant relationship between design factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt”, and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

**Hypothesis 5:** There is no significant relationship between social factor and repeat purchase of

restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 11: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Social Factor and Repeat Purchase of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis.**

**Correlations**

		REPEAT PURCHASE	SOCIAL FACTOR
REPEAT PURCHASE	Pearson Correlation	1	.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
SOCIAL FACTOR	Pearson Correlation	.764**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)

The result in table 11 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.764. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a strong relationship between social factor and repeat purchase. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that social factor positively relates repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in social factor would likely increase repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant relationship between social factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt”, and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

**Hypothesis 6**

There is no significant relationship between social factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 12: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Social Factor and Customer Referral of Restaurants in Port Harcourt Metropolis.**

**Correlations**

		CUSTOMER REFERRAL	SOCIAL FACTOR
CUSTOMER REFERRAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.737**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
SOCIAL FACTOR	Pearson Correlation	.737**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	364	364

Source: SPSS-generated output (2020)

The result in table 12 above shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.737. This value is significant which suggests the existence of a very strong relationship between social factor and customer referral. The positive sign of this correlation coefficient gives the evidence that social factor positively relates customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This implies that an increase in social factor would likely increase customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Given the significant 2-tail value (PV) = 0.000 < 0.005, the researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant relationship between social factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt”, and concludes that a significant relationship exists between them.

### Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were made:

The influence of ambient factor on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

The influence of design factor on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

The influence of social factor on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt is to a high extent.

There is significant relationship between ambient factor and repeat purchase, customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.931 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

There is significant relationship between ambient factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.848 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

There is significant relationship between design factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.679 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

There is significant relationship between design factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.780 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

There is significant relationship between social factor and repeat purchase of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.764 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

There is significant relationship between social factor and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Result of analysis shows that PPMC coefficient is calculated at 0.737 > r-critical = 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This research which studied the influence of eatery atmosphere on customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt supports previous studies conducted in the academic space. The researchers' intention was to determine if eatery atmosphere in ambient factor, design factor and social factor correlates with customer loyalty in repeat purchase and customer loyalty of restaurants in Port Harcourt. Analysis of primary data collected from 364 respondents representing the totality of restaurant customers in Port Harcourt reveal that Eatery Atmosphere is significantly associated with customer loyalty.

Our findings support Shahrulliza et al., (2014) who revealed that store design and social factors is significant with store loyalty. This finding accepts the study by Oktay (2016) who revealed a statistically significant relationship between the internal and external components of a hotel atmosphere and employee factors. It also corroborate (Dylan et al., 2016) in their study on the influence of restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction, who found a simultaneous effect between restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction. The influence of atmospherics in marketing contexts is based on the premise that the design of an environment through a variety of means including lighting, layout, sound, colour, and temperature could stimulate perceptual and emotional responses in consumers and affect their behaviours, (Kotler, 1973). This was totally agreed to by (Wall and Berry, 2007) in their research maintained that although food quality is basic, the ambience and service performance greatly influence a customer's evaluation of a particular establishment. Hence the researcher in her opinion accepts the result of this finding and maintains that both ambient, design and social factors of the restaurants have the ability of influencing customer loyalty.

## **CONCLUSION**

The mean results of our findings show that eatery atmosphere in ambient, design and social factors influence customer loyalty in repeat purchase and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt, also the Pearson product moment coefficient analysis result reveal a significant relationship between ambient factor, design factor, social factor and repeat purchase and customer referral of restaurants in Port Harcourt. This result indicated positivity of eatery atmosphere in restaurants in Port Harcourt.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the finding and conclusion of this research the following recommendations are made:

1. The restaurants in Port Harcourt should install necessary ambient elements such as décor, temperature, scent, lighting, color, and delightful music and consistently maintaining their functionalities.
2. The restaurants in Port Harcourt should adopt latest global designs in complex decoration and maintaining both internal and external facilities that provide customer comfort.

3. The restaurants in Port Harcourt should reduce overcrowding by providing adequate number of dining tables and maintaining minimum number of sales persons.

## REFERENCES

- Anna, S., & Mattila, J. W. (2008). Environmental stimulation and social factors on impulse purchasing. *Journal of services marketing*, 5(2), 173-187.
- Baker, J., Parasuraman, D., Grewal, D., & Voss, G.B. (2002). The influence of multiple store environment cues on perceived merchandise value and patronage intentions. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(2), 120-141.
- Baker, J.; Levy, M.; Grewal, D. (2006). An experimental approach to making retail store environmental decisions. *Journal of marketing*, 58(4), 104-126.
- Beard, J.D., & Williams, D.L. (1993). A professional profile of business communication educators and their research preferences: Survey results. *The Journal of Business Communication*, 30, 269-296.
- Bitner, M.J. (1992) Servicescapes: The Impact of Physical Surroundings on Customers and Employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56, 57-71.
- Bitner, M.J. (2004). Evaluating service encounters: the effects of physical surroundings and employee responses. *Journals of marketing*, 2(4), 82-106
- Carbone, M.T. (1994). The history and development of business communication principles. *The Journal of Business Communication*, 31, 173-192.
- Countryman, C. C., & Jang, S. (2006). The effects of atmospheric elements on customer impression: The case of hotel lobbies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(12), 534–545.
- Czepiel, J., Congram, C., & Shanahan, J. (2018.). The services challenge: *Integrating for competitive advantage*, 6(3), 79-84.
- Dylan, C. S., David, P. E., & Linda, L. (2016). The influence of restaurant ambience and service quality on customer satisfaction at PondokHijau restaurant Manado. *Journal Berkalallmiah Efisiensi*, 16(3), 1-12.
- Grossbart, S.; Hampton, R.; Rammohan, R.; Lapidus, R. (2010). Environmental dispositions and customer responses to store atmospherics.
- HashimF., Mohamad, F. B., & Raja, P. S. (2010). Restaurant's atmospheric elements: what the customer wants. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 38(2012), 380 – 387.
- Hui, M.; Bateson, J. (2007). Perceived control and the effects of crowding and consumer choice on the service experience. *Journal on consumer behaviour*. Vol. 2 pp 36-57.
- Klaus, P., & Maklan, S. (2012). EXQ: a multiple-scale for assessing service experience. *Journal of Service Management*, 23, 1, pp. 5–33.
- Lin, L. (2010). The relationship of consumer personality trait, brand personality and brand loyalty: an empirical study of toys and video games buyers", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*,

Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 4-17.

- Mandhachitara, R., & Poolthong, Y. (2011). A model of customer loyalty and corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 25, 122–133.
- Mathwick, C., Malhotra, N., & Rigdon, E. (2001). Experiential value: Conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalogue and internet shopping environment. *Journal of Retailing*, 77(91) 39–56.
- Noreldzaihan, M. R., Rosidah, M., & Mazzini, M. (2016). Reconceptualization of customer experience quality (CXQ) measurement scale. *Economics and Finance*, 37(2016), 299-303.
- Okta, E. (2016). A study of the relationship between service atmosphere and customer loyalty with specific reference to structural equation modeling. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 29(1), 706-720.
- Shahrulliza, M., Rosidah, M., & Noordiana, S. A. (2014). Unleashing the effect of store atmospherics on hedonic experience and store loyalty. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30(14), 469 – 478.
- Steenkamp, J.-B.; Baumgartner, H. (2005). The role of optimum stimulation level in exploratory consumer behavior. *Journal on Behavioural sciences on marketing*. 51(17), 221- 228.
- Turley, L. W., & Milliman, R.E. (2000). Atmospheric effects on shopping behavior, a review of the experimental evidence. *Journal of Business Research*, 49(2), 193-211.
- Weinrach, J. (2000). Environmental psychology: Why should we care? *Environmental Quality Management*, 10(8), 83–86.
- Wirtz, J.; Bateson, J.E.G. (2013). Consumer satisfaction with services: integrating the environmental perspective in services marketing into the traditional disconfirmation paradigm. *International journal of marketing*. 43(6), 82-90.
- Yoo, M., & Bai, B. (2013). Customer loyalty marketing research: A comparative approach between hospitality and business journals. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 33(9), 166–177.