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## PHYSICAL EVIDENCE AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE FOR REENGINEERING OF FAST-FOOD OUTLETS IN PORT HARCOURT

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the relationship between physical evidence and customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised of an estimated 205, 400 customers from the 10 selected fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. Information regarding the population of this study was obtained from the Rivers State Yellow pages 2013/2014 edition. The sample size of 204 customers was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan 1970 Table for sample size determination. Out of the 204 copies of questionnaire administered, 181 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. The bivariate analysis was done using the spearman rank order correlation coefficient (r) at 0.05 level of significant with SPSS version 22.0. The findings revealed that physical evidence related positively with repeat purchase and customer retention. This in effect means that physical evidence enhances customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlet. The study concluded that physical evidence significantly enhances customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. It was recommended that management of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt should improve in their physical evidence to develop higher degree of customers' patronage.*

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## Introduction

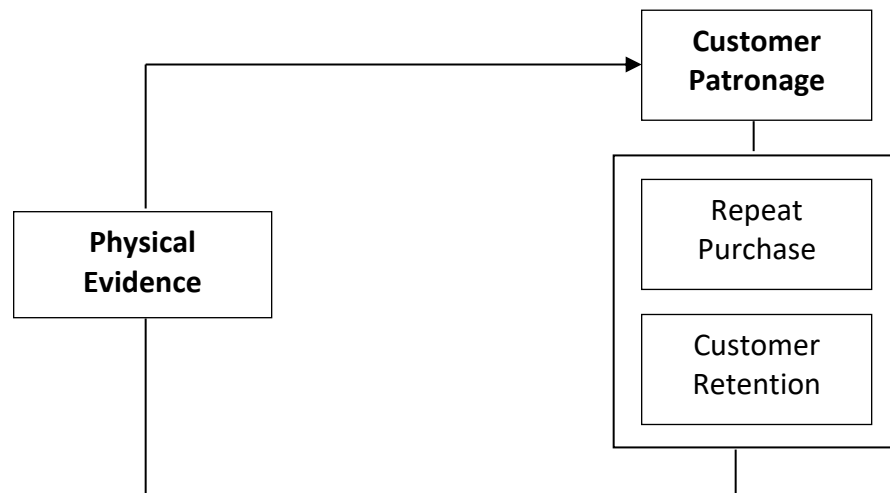
In many cities in Nigeria, one can find numerous fast-food restaurants where most of the foods sold are usually snacks, burgers, fries, chicken, cola drinks, ice cream, fruit drinks and other foods that are high in fat, sodium and sugar (Ojinnaka, 2011). The growth of this business can be noted in the fact that the number of fast-food eating establishments scattered all over major streets of big cities, increased in the past few years with different exotic and enticing names (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). In today's society, the demand for food is on the increase. The increase in fast-food consumption is attributable to a situation where most consumers are busy, working-class people that have little or no time for home cooking. Thus, the need for fast-food arises in their daily life. Also, the increase in workload and engagement at work keep them busy at all times at workplace, this creates less time for them at home to prepare food of their choice. Thus, the need for fast-food outlets in every nook and cranny in Port Harcourt arises as most individuals engaged in official assignments and duties away from home, makes the consumption of fast-food a fact of life.

Previous studies have shown that the consumption of fast-food was attributed to inadequate time for preparation of food at home and a lifestyle of people in the urban centres coupled with food quality and physical evidence of fast-food outlets (Ahmed, Hosain, Malek & Begum, 2008; Fakokunde, Iwarere & Mustapha, 2014). According to Akinbola, Ogunnaike and Ojo (2013), the taste of food, low price, readily availability of fast-food, peer pressure and marketing strategies make the popularity of fast-food outlets high amongst children and adolescent. This makes consumers demand

quality, price fairness and conducive evidence from the owners of fast-food outlets. Physical evidence plays a crucial role in the assessment of fast-food outlets as it is regarded as one of the factors that customers considered before visiting any fast-food outlets (Hanaysha, 2016a). Physical evidence is a determinant factor in consumers' patronage, as it is recognized as important marketing factor that influences consumers' behaviour towards purchasing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Therefore, physical evidence is an important factor that can lead to increase in customers' patronage of fast-food outlets.

The evaluation of customers overall repurchase intention in a fast-food outlet, Namkung and Jang (2007) stated is conducive evidence. Therefore, physical evidence is evaluated on the basis of the internal and external evidence of the fast-food in terms of car parking space, dining room, lighting, state of the art equipment in serving the food and etc. Physical evidence is a significant factor that gets the attention of customer in fast-food retail outlets. Fast-food meant for consumption must be processed in a hygienic manner and neat evidence.

Despite the increasing popularity and increasing population of people and fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt, there is a decrease in consumers' patronage of fast-food outlets (Association of fast-food confederation in Nigeria, 2017). This has led to some of the fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt closing their business and a lot of them complaining of low patronage. It is on this ground that this study was carried out to examine the relationship between physical evidence and customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework of the relationship between Physical Evidence and Customer Patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt

**Source:** Desk Research, 2022

In view of this an attempt was made to address the following research questions:

- i. Is there any relationship between physical evidence and repeat purchase for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt?
- ii. Is there any relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt?

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on the social exchange theory. The social exchange theory was propounded by George Casper Homans in the year 1958. Social exchange theory postulates that “give and take” forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions might vary as per the degree of the relationship. The social exchange theory assumes that in a relationship, every individual has expectations from his or her partner. The extent to which such expectations are satisfied determines the strength and survival of the relationship. Also, that good relationships are mutually beneficial and not supposed to be one sided.

An individual invests his or her time and energy in a relationship only when he or she gets something out of corresponding or higher value from it.

Going by the assumption of the social exchange theory the extent to which fast-food outlets operators create conducive physical evidence for customers, the more customers will be happy in patronizing such fast-food outlets. On the other hand, poor physical evidence in which some fast-food operators operate is capable of causing customer switch and results in low patronage (Taiwo, 2018). Thus, the social exchange theory predicts customer patronage as a reciprocal response to conducive physical evidence in fast-food outlets.

### Concept of Physical Evidence

Physical evidence is an important element in the fast-food outlets that help to build competitive advantage for the industry. Physical evidence comprises of all the tangible and intangible elements that are located inside and outside a fast-food

outlet (Bitner, 1992). To improve the physical evidence, fast-food retail outlets owners should invest heavily on internal designs, decorations, floor cleanliness, and other accessories that help to beautify an outlet as such elements are the most critical investments for attracting customers' patronage in a fast-food outlet (Azim, Shah, Mahmood, & Bagram, 2014). Ambient evidence of a fast-food outlet includes those features of intangible background that have significant impact on consumers' patronage and relative response towards the evidence of a service provider (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002). Those features of intangible background comprise of temperature, lighting, scent, noise, quality of air and music (Bitner, 1992). Well-structured physical evidence in a fast-food retail outlet provides distinctive customers' experience and ability to revisit the fast-food retail outlets frequently. Choi, Heo and Kim (2012) asserted that the major element of physical evidence includes aesthetics, the surroundings, functionality, and convenience that help to attract customers to a fast-food retail outlet.

Physical Evidence (servicescape) could be seen as the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact; combined with tangible commodities that facilities performance or communication of the service (Booms & Bitner, 1992). Bitner (1992) defined physical evidence as the built environment which has artificial physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment. Furthermore, Namasiviyam and Lin (2008) described physical Evidence as the physical environment of an organization encompassing several different elements, such as overall layout, design and décor of a store. The physical Evidence also includes

aspects of atmospherics such as temperature, lighting, colours, music and scent. The physical evidence is the outward appearance of the organization and thus can be critical in forming initial impression or setting up customer expectations (Anand, 2008).

The importance of maintaining good-looking physical evidence had received high emphasis from previous studies where fast-food owners were considered as a significant factor for reinforcing and increasing the customers' patronage in fast-food outlets (Ryu & Han, 2010). Previous studies discovered that the physical evidence of a fast food outlet has a positive impact on the customers' patronage (Nasir *et al.*, 2014).

### **Concept of Customer Patronage**

Customers' patronage refers to a situation whereby an individual shows effort in choosing the best way in evaluating the activities of fast-food outlet in relations to ways and manners they are treated and satisfied with their products which was purchased at the initial stage without any stress engagement (Adiele & Grend, 2016). Customer patronage has been linked with different variables in fast-food retail outlets. Previous studies stated that the major variables attributed to customers' patronage include physical setting of the outlets, business location, corporate identity, food patronage, price fairness and advanced inclination behaviour (Chukwu & Uzoma, 2014; Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015; Ogwo & Igwe, 2012). Jere *et al.* (2014) asserted that a conceptualized notion of customers' patronage is antecedent by altitudinal and behavioural intentions which help to offer several benefits which include; functional or utilitarian benefits, hedonic benefits and psychological benefits (Hamilton-Ibama & Ogonu, 2021).

People patronize organizations products/services at one time or the other. Patronage is born out of a desire to be committed to an organization either based on its service quality or perceived service qualities (Owuso & Hamilton-Ibama, 2022). Hence, the extent to which a customer will patronize the services of an organisation depends on how the customer perceives the organisations physical environment and how the customer also thinks and feels that the condition of the service environment is consistent with his / her personality. Newman (2006) noted that dissatisfied consumers are less likely to repurchase the brand than satisfied consumers. Oliver (1980) hypothesized customer patronage influences attitude, which in turn affects repurchase intention. Results supported this view in that customer patronage had a positive effect on attitude. These positive attitudes were found to increase patronage or purchase intention, which is consistent with the Fishbein model. Many have found that customer patronage influences post-purchase intention. This implies that customer patronage is likely to increase repeat purchase behavior and brand loyalty and reduce brand switching.

Patronage behaviour of fast-food retail outlets can be measured by different variables including patronage intention, shopping enjoyment, satisfaction, time spent, number of items bought, money spent, share of wallet, patronage action and repeat purchase or re-patronage and lots more (Jere *et al.*, 2015; Chukwu & Uzoma, 2014; Adiele & Opara, 2015). Food patronage in the fast-food retail outlets refers to the deliberate attitudes of a customer to consistently buy cooked food from a particular fast-food outlet instead of buying it with another outlet (Jalah, 2016a). Studies in the past had shown that some of

the major determinants in customers patronage of a fast-food retail outlet differs from individual to individual and from country to another due to the societal differences, differences in societal culture and evidence (Adiele & Etuk, 2017; Adiele & Grend, 2016). The major attributes of customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets are food quality, physical evidence of the outlets, service quality and price fairness (Ahmed, Ghazali & Olhman, 2013). In addition, Sefian, Jani, Sharudin and Abdullahi (2013) found that food quality, service quality, perceived values, physical evidence are the major influence of customers patronage in fast-food retail outlets. Customer patronage here is looked at in the perspective of repeat purchase and customer retention.

### **Repeat Purchase**

Repeat purchase is the patronage of a service provider by a consumer of the same brand name previously bought on another occasion (Hamilton-Ibama & Ogonu, 2022). A repeat purchase is often a measure of retention of a brand by consumers and is often taken into account by marketing research professionals to evaluate a business. Consumer gets brand preference only when that brand lives up to his expectation. This brand preference naturally repeats sales. A satisfied buyer is a silent advertisement. But, if the used brand does not yield desired satisfaction, negative feeling will occur and that will lead to the formation of negative attitude towards brand. This phenomenon is called cognitive dissonance. Marketers try to use this phenomenon to attract user of other brands to their brands. Significantly, purchase action by a customer subsumes psychological principles that have been evolved to exploit an understanding of consumers' needs so that products can be

developed, designed, and communicated in a justified manner that can mirror the applicable and substantial requirements of consumers.

Grewal and Levy (2010) editorialize that conventionally, consumer decision making has been delineated as an analogous of five refined stages known as: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase processes. All decision-making is channeled towards a determination of a purchase action. Consumers' choice impact shoppers' discernments of commodity value and consequently their aspiration to constitute a purchase act.

### **Customer Retention**

Consumers are sophisticated choice makers that go for any alternative products or services in the market place while searching for satisfaction. It is therefore, not surprising that marketers invest fortune on research in order to know basic facts about the buying behaviours of consumers so as to design marketing strategies that would influence consumption decisions. More money, time and efforts are spent attracting new customers to their services/products rather than retaining customers after a purchase. As a result, there is a paradigm shift in the marketing environment to a more reasonable alternative i.e. customer retention through service quality (Hamilton-Ibama, 2020). Customer retention has become the main agenda for the firms who emphasize on maintaining a productive relationship with customers, besides functioning as a key instrument to generate financial gains (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Past literatures indicate that customer's price insensitivity is the key stimulus for satisfying firm's customers (Shiff-man, Kanuk & Kumar, 2010; Trasorras *et al.*, 2009). The retained customer would not mind paying slightly

higher prices and look forward for discounts as compared to the new customers. This is because retained customers believe that slightly higher prices indicate higher quality besides indicating firms above average customer service. These customers normally shop all year round even after discount periods at their preferred shops and find it worthwhile to do so due to the value for money component (Ang & Buttle, 2006; Honts & Hanson, 2011; Ahmad & Buttle, 2002).

Customer retention implies that organisations strive to form and maintain good relationship with customers in an effort to continue doing business with them in the future (Murphy *et al* 2006). Customer retention involves a focus on existing customers with an intention to develop a long-term relationship with them which will lead to the generation of further business (Harrison & Ansell, 2002). According to Ang and Buttle (2006) focusing on customer retention can yield several economic benefits, that is, the longer customer stays with the firm, the repeated patronage results in increase in the volume purchased, customer referral will also increase as well. Customer retention strategy aims to keep a high proportion of valuable customers by reducing customer defections (churn) (Hoffman *et al*, 2005). Frederick (2006) is of the view that customer retention is the activity that a selling organisation undertakes in order to reduce customer switching behaviour. Successful customer retention starts with the first contact an organisation has with a customer and continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship. He argued that company's ability to attract and retain new customers is not only related to its products or services, but strongly related to the way it services its existing customers and the reputation it creates within and across the marketplace.

Customer retention is a performance indicator that has the tendency of a customer to “stick with” a brand above and beyond the objective and subjective assessments (Sorce, 2002). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) have observed that a 5 percent improvement in customer retention can cause an increase in profitability of between 25 and 85 percent (Net Present Value). Customers that stay with a company tend to be satisfied with the relationship and are less likely to switch to competitors, making it difficult for competitors to enter the market or gain market share. Customer retention is more than giving the customer what they expect; it’s about exceeding their expectations so that they can become loyal and advocate for your brand (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006). Firms would not be able to uphold and increase their performance without customers as firms are believed to have no revenues, no profits and therefore no market value (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006; Buttle, 2004).

Hamilton-Ibama and Ihunwo (2022) stated that customer retention is the activity that a selling organization undertakes in order to reduce customer defections. Pegler (2004) contribution stressed that customer retention should be one of the primary objectives of an organization during tough economic times as experienced today. To succeed, customer retention must be top-down, companywide initiative where commitment, trust, and loyalty is generated through cooperation, brand loyalty and communication (Webster, 1992). Dawes and Swailes (1999) posits that successful customer retention circumvents the costs of seeking new and potentially risky customers, and allows organizations to focus more accurately on the needs of their existing customers by building relationships. The benefits of maintaining a base of long-term

customers are widely recognized by marketers. Given that the cost of retaining an existing customer is less than prospecting for a new customer (Spreng, *et al*, 1995).

#### **Physical Evidence and Customers Patronage**

Hanaysha (2016b) examined the effect of physical environment on brand equity of restaurant industry in Malaysian market. The data was gathered from 293 customers of international fast food restaurant brands in East Coast Malaysia. The collected data was coded into SPSS and analysed using structural equation modeling approach (SEM) on AMOS. The findings indicated that the physical environment of a restaurant has significant positive effect on its brand equity. Moreover, this paper found that physical environment has significant positive effect on the dimensions of brand equity, namely: brand image, brand loyalty, brand preference, and brand leadership.

#### **Physical Evidence and Repeat Purchase**

Findings of Reamer and Kuehn (2005) and Wakcfield and Blodgett (2006) stated that the most important elements of achieving success in the fast-food retail outlets in terms of customers patronage is the physical evidence. The study therefore stated that any pleasant and innovative evidence attracts customers’ patronage in fast-food retail outlets and makes them to repeat purchase. Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013) found that customers at all-time sense the physical evidence consciously (or unconsciously) before, during and after the dining out in a fast-food retail outlet, therefore, they stated that restaurants food must be in acceptable quality, pleasing physical evidence which will help the fast-food retail outlets to increase repeat purchase as such customers’ patronage.

Hascra, MutstIdwa and Dhliwayo (2013) examined the impact of ambient

factors on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets in Zimbabwe. The study used descriptive research design. The sample size for the study was 150 customers. The method of data analysis was multiple regression. The findings of the study revealed that ambient variables (music, low level of noise, lighting and cool temperature) significantly influence patronage of consumers in fast-food retail outlets with different level of influence. The study therefore recommends that marketing practitioners should be encouraged to use ambient variables in their various outlets, as this will help in creating high appealing evidence for repeat purchase and attracting customers' patronage. Ryu and Jang (2008) found that physical evidence has a positive significant impact on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets.

Based on the above empirical dispositions the study hypothesized:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between physical evidence and repeat purchase for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.

### **Physical Evidence and Customer Retention**

Adiele, Grend and Ezirim (2015) study examined the impact of physical evidence on customer patronage of quoted Banks in south-south zone of Nigeria. 14 quoted Banks at the Nigeria Stock Exchange Market were used for the study. The research considered firm level of analysis and top managers unit of analysis. Customers of the chosen banks were also used. By this arrangement, 42 managers and 7 customers randomly selected constituted our respondents for the study. Descriptively, the study variables were presented and inferentially, the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the various hypotheses. The result of the analysis

showed that there is a strong positive and significant correlation between physical evidence and customer patronage. The study specifically revealed that efficient design of work place ambience; physical architecture and signs significantly impact on sales volume, profit margin and customer retention.

Githiri (2017) examined the influence of physical evidence on customers' patronage and satisfaction in Kenya rated restaurants. The study used survey research design. The sample size of the study was 345 customers. Pearson correlation was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that physical evidence has a positive significant influence on customers' patronage and satisfaction. They concluded that when the customers are satisfied, they are retained. Bitner (1992) found that the three major attributes of physical evidence which are ambient conditions, spatial layout, symbols, and artifacts positively impacted positively on customers' patronage of fast-food retail outlets.

Canny (2014) asserted that physical evidence is a key marketing tool and strategy that helps to differentiate fast-food retail outlets from one another by helping them to establish a distinctive customer experience with a beautiful, pleasant and comfortable atmospherically condition. Therefore, physical evidence impacts positively on maintaining the old customers, the existing ones, as well as attracting new customers to fast-food outlets. Moreover, well-designed physical evidence is an important element that help in influencing the decision of consumers with respect to pre-purchase, immediate purchase as well as their post-purchase behaviour while evaluating their satisfaction towards the quality of products and services of a service provider (Bitner. 1992). Physical evidence of



a fast-food retail outlet plays a very-key role in the fast-food outlet with respect to customer satisfaction and return intention that will help to increase the performance of fast-food outlet (Jalah, 2016b). Most of the previous studies have shown that physical evidence helps to increase customers' mood with respect to pre-consumption before the actual service is delivered to them. This indicated that physical evidence can positively or negatively influence consumer patronage.

Based on the above empirical dispositions the study hypothesized:

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.

### Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised of an estimated 205, 400 customers from the selected fast-food outlets in Port

Harcourt. Information regarding the population of this study was obtained from the Rivers State Yellow pages 2013/2014 edition. The Taro Yamene's method for sample size determination was used to obtain a sample size of 204 respondents. 204 copies of structured questionnaire were administered and 188 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. The bivariate analysis (test of hypotheses) was done using the Spearman's Rank order correlation coefficient (r) at 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 22.0.

### Data Analysis and Results

The analyses of the results of the study are done as follows:

#### Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between physical evidence and repeat purchase for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.

**Table 1: Rho Correlation between Physical Evidence and Repeat Purchase**

Rho		Physical Evidence	Repeat Purchase
Physical Evidence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181
Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.623**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

**\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Table 1 shows r value of 0.623 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than 0.05. The H<sub>01</sub> was rejected while the H<sub>a1</sub> was accepted meaning that physical evidence has a significant positive relationship with repeat purchase for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. The correlation coefficient of 0.623 indicates that there is a strong positive relationship

between physical evidence and customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.

#### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt.

**Table 2: Rho Correlation between Physical Evidence and Customer Retention.**

Rho		Physical Evidence	Customer Retention
Physical Evidence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181
Customer Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.655**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

**\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Table 2 shows r value of 0.655 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than 0.05, hence, the  $H_{02}$  was rejected while alternate hypothesis that there is significant relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt was accepted. This implies that there is a significant relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. The correlation coefficient of 0.655 indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlet in Port Harcourt.

## Discussion of Findings

### Physical Evidence and Repeat Purchase

The data analysis revealed that physical evidence has a significant positive relationship with repeat purchase for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. This present study findings corroborate the findings of Jalah (2016b), Reamer and Kuehn (2005), Wakcfild and Blodgelt (2006), Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013). Jalah (2016b) examined physical evidence as a key success factor for building customers patronage in restaurant industry. The findings of his study revealed that physical evidence of restaurants has

positive significance on customers' patronage. Findings of Reamer and Kuehn (2005) and Wakcfild and Blodgelt (2006) stated that the most important elements of achieving success in the fast-food retail outlets in terms of customers patronage is the physical evidence. The study therefore stated that any pleasant and innovative evidence attracts customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets and makes them to repeat purchase. Furthermore, Ahmed, Ghazali and Othman (2013) found that customers at all-time sense the physical evidence consciously (or unconsciously) before, during and after the dining out in a fast-food retail outlet, therefore, they stated that restaurants food must be in acceptable quality, pleasing physical evidence which will help the fast-food retail outlets to increase repeat purchase as such customers' patronage.

This present study finding is also in line with the findings of Hasra, MutstIdwa and Dhliwayo (2013), Ryu and Jang (2008). Hasra, MutstIdwa and Dhliwayo (2013) examined the impact of ambient factors on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets in Zimbabwe. The findings of their study revealed that ambient variables (music, low level of noise, lighting and cool temperature) significantly influence patronage of consumers in fast-food retail

outlets with different level of influence. This will help in creating high appealing evidence for repeat purchase and attracting customers' patronage. Ryu and Jang (2008) found that physical evidence has a positive significant impact on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets.

### **Physical Evidence and Customer Retention**

The analysis of data of this present study revealed that there is significant positive relationship between physical evidence and customer retention for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. The findings revealed that physical evidence has a significant positive impact on customers' patronage. This shows that as the physical evidence of fast-food outlets continue to increase the physical factors in their fast-food outlets, the patronage of customers continues to increase.

The findings of Adiele, Grend and Ezirim (2015), Githiri (2017), Bitner (1992), Rye *et al.*, (2012), Haery and Badezadel (2014), Jalah (2016a), affirmed that physical evidence affects customer retention. Adiele, Grend and Ezirim (2015) study examined the impact of physical evidence on customer patronage of quoted Banks in south-south zone of Nigeria. 14 quoted Banks at the Nigeria Stock Exchange Market were used for the study. The result of the analysis showed that there is a strong positive and significant correlation between physical evidence and customer patronage. The study specifically revealed that efficient design of work place ambience; physical architecture and signs significantly impact on sales volume, profit margin and customer retention. Also, Githiri (2017) examined the influence of physical evidence on customers' patronage and satisfaction in Kenya rated restaurants. The findings of the study revealed that physical evidence has a positive significant influence on customers' patronage and satisfaction. They concluded that when the customers are satisfied, they are

retained. Bitner (1992) found that the three major attributes of physical evidence which are ambient conditions, spatial layout, symbols, and artifacts positively impacted positively on customers' patronage of fast-food retail outlets.

Furthermore, the study of Hasera, Mutstidwa and Dhliwayo (2013), and Ryu and Jang (2008) affirms the findings and conclusion of this present study that physical evidence has a significant positive impact on customers' retention. Hasera, Mutstidwa and Dhliwayo (2013) examined the impact of ambient factors on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets in Zimbabwe. Their study revealed that ambient variables (music, low level of noise, lighting and cool temperature) significantly influence patronage of consumers in fast-food retail outlets with different level of influence. Ryu and Jang (2008) found that physical evidence has a positive significant impact on customers' patronage in fast-food retail outlets.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study examined the relationship between physical evidence and customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that physical evidence has a significant positive effect on customer patronage for reengineering of fast-food outlets in Port Harcourt. This shows that when the physical evidence of the fast-food outlet is conducive for the customers, they patronize the products and services of the outlets more.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Managers of fast-food outlets should increase the level of their physical environments as this will help their fast-food outlet, to form a good image that will help in promoting their brands, encourage repeat purchase and retention of customers.

- ii. Managers of fast-food outlets should emphasis more on physical evidence when designing their marketing strategies and programmes to look attractive to customers from different perspectives to enhance patronage.
- iii. Fast - food outlets managers should find more ways to improve on the external appearance of their outlets. This will also help in a long way to increase the customers patronage in the future.

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