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## **SERVICE BRAND EXPERIENCE AND CUSTOMER BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS IN QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS (QSRs) IN RIVERS STATE**

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**Didia Benedicta<sup>1</sup> and \*Ekeke, John Ndubueze<sup>2</sup>**

1&2 Department of Hospitality Management & Tourism, Faculty of Management Sciences,  
University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria.

\*Author for correspondence Email: [john.ekeke@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:john.ekeke@uniport.edu.ng)

ORCID ID: [orcid.org/0000-0002-9067-3780](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9067-3780)

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### **Abstract**

This study was carried out primarily to investigate the relationship between service brand experience and customers' behavioural intentions Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) in the hospitality industry in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to; ascertain the relationship between service brand experience and two measures of customers' behavioural intentions: brand engagement and word of mouth communication. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of study was large and unknown. Consequently, the sample size of 138 determined using Cochran formula for sample size determination from a infinite population. Primary data was utilized in the study. Primary data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire and administered to the customers of QSRs in a university business environment, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The questionnaire was validated through face and content validity. The internal consistency of the instrument was excellent (.818) using Chronbach Alpha. Statistical tools for data analyses included descriptive analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis. Major findings show that service brand experience had positive significant effect on brand engagement and word of mouth communication. The study therefore concluded that enhancing service brand experience is essential for the promotion of consumers' experiential responses. It was recommended that the owners/managers of QSRs should develop a robust service quality marketing strategy capable of enhancing the service experience of the QSRs

### **Keywords:**

*Service brand experience. Brand engagement. Word of Mouth Communication. Quality Service Restaurants.*

### **Introduction**

Fonda, et al (2023) posit that the high degree of competition in the marketplace requires organizations to be in a position where they can create competitive advantage that is sustainable in nature as a result of several competitors that are operating in the same industry. In an ever more competitive and interconnected industry that is characterised by a transparent business environment, such as a service marketing environment, service brands are expected to offer

memorable experiences to their customers as a means of differentiate themselves and thus build a solid competitive position in the marketplace (Berry et al., 2002; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Changes in lifestyle and the trend of increasing people's income in Indonesia have changed food consumption preferences, especially in big cities.

Markovic et al., (2018) agrees with the foregoing by stating that such challenge is more prevalent in the services sector of the economy. Typical examples are hotels, airlines, Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs), etc., which all operates in the tourism and hospitality industry. This is due to the distinctive nature of a service marketing that is characterised by intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Berry, 1980; Zeithaml et al., 1985). In addition, Grönroos (2006) posited that in addition to the characteristics of service, the existence of numerous touch-points between service brands and their many customers possess additional challenge in the marketing of services. Owners and managers of service brands are therefore expected to pay attention to service marketing strategies that are capable of enhancing positive customers' behavioural intentions towards the organisations. In extant literature, scholars are of the view that a favourable brand experience is capable of promoting customer/guest satisfaction, customer affective commitment, brand equity, the quality of the brand customer relationships, and positive customers' behavioural intentions towards the service brand (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009; Yao et al., 2013).

The foregoing is in consonance with the fact that experience has become the product in the competitive hospitality industry, thus confirming the paradigm shift from traditional marketing to experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999; Pine & Gilmore 1999; Brakus, et al, 2009). This implies that owners/managers of tourism service organisations like hotels, restaurants, car rental companies, airlines, etc., are expected to develop capabilities in delivering of excellent brand experiences because of its ability to enhance customers/guests positive behavioural responses to the service brand.

The quest to build a better brand experience demands that a services brand should also place special emphasis on recruiting, training, and developing employees (Berry, 1981; Grönroos, 2011) because they are responsible for delivering quality service and therefore possess the capacity to either make or break the brand (Roper & Davies, 2007) in each of their contacts or interactions with customers. Through their service performance, service employees promotes or mar customers' behavioural intentions towards the brands. As noted by Balmer (2017) service employees are the critical stakeholders in services settings and consequently, the provision of a superior experience will depend on service employees' state of motivation and commitment. This remains the key for excellent quality service delivery in service brands. on the other hand, the inability to quality service will trigger negative customers' behavioural intentions.

In extant literature, there are empirical evidence studied in various contexts at the exclusion of Nigeria to prove that brand experience commonly called customer experience affects consumer behavioural intentions (Brakus, et al., 2009; Kassim, et al 2014; Ebrahim, et al., 2013; Chinomona, & Sandada, 2013; Abdul Gani, et al, 2019; Jang & Feng 2007; Alia, et al 2014). This current study attempts to fill the gap in literature by investigating the effect of service brand experience on customers' behavioural intentions in the context of QSRs operating in a university business environment in Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria.

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

The aim of this study was to ascertain the effect of brand experience on customers' behavioural intentions towards Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to;

Examine the effect of service experience on customers' brand engagement towards QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ascertain the effect of service experience on customers' word of mouth communication towards QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

## **Research Hypotheses**

Premised on the aim and objectives and research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated in line with the objective of the study:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Service experience does not have significant effect customers' brand engagement towards QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Service experience does not have significant effect on customers' word of mouth communication towards QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Review**

**Service Brand Experience:** Service experience is defined as the subjective personal reactions and feelings by consumers when consuming or using a service. It describes the total feelings which a customer gets from all the interactions he gets from the service brand. It should not be regarded as a final result but how it feels to get there. The implication being that in a service encounter, every touch point is very important and contributes to service experience. Luoh & Tsauro, (2011) found that service experience has an important influence on the consumer evaluation of and satisfaction with a given service. Wang (1999) noted that guest experience in any hospitality-based businesses have been found to contribute significantly in the enhancement of memories about such places/service brands.

### **Customers' Behavioural Intentions (CBI)**

Customers' Behavioural Intentions (CBI) describes the responses of consumers towards brands in the marketplace. This implies that such responses depends on what value the target customers derive from the value derived from business dealings/transactions and therefore the response to organisational marketing activities could either be positive/favourable or negative/unfavourable (Ladhari, 2009; Zeithaml, et al, 1996). This explain why extant literature tend to suggest that behavioural intentions represent an indicator of whether a customer will like to stay with an organization or go away to a competing brand (Alexandris, et al 2004; Kang, et al, 2002). Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Zeithaml et al (1996) posit that customer behavioural intentions consist of four principal dimensions: purchase intention, word-of-mouth communications, price sensitivity and complaining behaviour. For this current study, brand engagement and positive word of mouth commun are used as the latent measures for customers' behavioural intentions.

**Brand engagement:** Brand engagement describes a connection between a customer and a brand. The connection is by nature long lasting and not casual based, and interdependence between parties (Resnick, 2001) in which both parties take an active role (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement has gained popularity in the marketing literature over last decade as an antecedent of customer purchase and brand loyalty (Prentice & Loureiro, 2018). When people are engaged with a brand, a strong psychological connection develops and is nurtured by the relationship between the brand and the target market (Hapsari et al., 2017). This connection leads to repeat purchases intentions and a long-term relationship with the brand (Hapsari et al., 2017).

**Word of Mouth Communication:** Word of Mouth Communication is defined as any positive communication about a service firm's offerings and it is considered a key relational outcome (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). As an information source, positive WOM is a powerful input into consumers' purchase decision making. This is very important for marketing professionals and their organisations. In the marketing context, WOM communication is considered as a highly trusted and credible information source in the marketing environment by consumers. Typical examples include situations where customers of a brand provides recommendations about the brand or service provider passes or makes positive remarks or recommendations about a brand/service provider thereby encouraging family and friends to patronise a particular brand or service provider. By so doing WOM assists in recruiting or attracting new customers and it is considered as a very important means of achieving an organisations' long term economic success(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002).

### Theoretical Foundations

**Self-Regulatory Focus Theory:** Self-regulatory focus theory is a theory of motivation which postulate that consumers vary in how they view their goals and how they pursue these goals (Higgins 1998). In specific terms, this theory proposes two states in the context of self-regulatory perspective: promotion focus and prevention focus. Promotion focus deals with the need for achievements and accomplishment. On the other hand, prevention focus makes provision for the need for safety and security. By their provisions, they play significant role in influencing consumers cognitive processes, the emotions experienced and behaviours that consumers adopt (Boesen-Mariani, Gomez & Gavard-Perret 2010). Extant studies have documented their influences on consumer product preference, choice and purchase intention (Aaker & Lee 2006; Pham & Avnet 2004). It is in this regard that Huber, Eisele and Meyer (2018) suggested linking self-congruity theory to self-regulatory focus theory based on the assumption that this theory is related to consumer's self-concept. The foregoing implies that consumers with prevention-focus will more likely pursue different self-motives that are socially consistent and self-enhancing. On the other hand, promotion-focused individuals or consumers are attracted towards brands that are congruent with their self concept. Consequently, the self-regulatory focus provides a good background to understand the effect of self-congruity.

### Empirical Review

#### Service Experience and Customer Behavioural Intentions

Manhas, and Tukamushaba, (2015) in four star rated hotels in India found that service experience had great impact on hotel's brand image. Ali, et al, (2016) investigated the relationships between service experience, emotions, satisfaction, and price acceptance in

Chinese resort hotels. The study found a significant relationship between service experience and emotions, jointly influencing customer satisfaction, which influences price acceptance of customers. Yrjölä, et al (2019) found that customer satisfaction with a restaurant experience was driven by emotion. The authors introduced the customer value perspective to restaurant experience and links quality attributes to value perceptions, as well as to behavioural intentions. Aydin and Ozer (2005) found that perceived service quality directly determines the perception of brand image. Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapci, (2011) found that brand experience had positive relationship with brand trust. On the other hand, Ramasehan and Stein, (2014) reported insignificant positive relationships between brand experience and brand trust.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** Churchill and Iacobucci, (2005) posit that research design is a blueprint for research to be followed in order to successfully implement the research. The research design chosen for this current study descriptive research design. This design focuses more on describing an extant and clearly defined process (Parasuraman, 1991). It also helps in assessing the characteristics of the variables examined in the study (Sekaran, 2005s).

**Population of Study:** The most suitable population of the present study included all customers of QSRs in a university community in Rivers State. It is important to note that the suitable place considered for collecting Data was the branch restaurants of the QSRs doing business at the University of Port Harcourt. Due to the fact that there was no accurate customers' database, the total number of customers that patronized these QSRs was considered to be unknown thereby making this population infinite (infinite population).

**Sample and Sampling Techniques:** Sampling is the selection of a subset of the population of interest in a research study. The population of this study is large and unknown. In this case the researcher adopted the Cochran formula to determine the sample size.

$$n = \frac{Z^2(pq)}{e^2}$$

where:

n = Sample size sought

z = Standard deviation for desired confidence value

p = Probability or percentage of positive responses

q = Probability or percentage of negative responses

e = Level of significance

n = unknown, z = 1.96, p = 0.90, q = 0.10, e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{1.96^2(0.80 \times 0.20)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416(0.16)}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.345744}{0.0025}$$

$$= 138.29 \cong 138$$

Therefore, the researcher administered 138 copies of questionnaires to the customers that were involved in the study data collecti for this research. The sample consisted of customers of QSRs that were found present at the time of administering the questionnaire at selected locations in Rivers State (dinning halls of QSRs at the Abuja and Choba campuses of the university of Port Harcourt, and class rooms when there is no lectures).

**Nature/Sources of Data:** For the purpose of this current research, primary data is most appropriate it was collected specifically for the purpose of the study.

**Methods of Data Collection / Instrumentation:** Primary data collection allows answering a particular research question, it is the most appropriate method for our study.

Self-administered questionnaire was used to gather primary data from the respondents. Self-administered questionnaire was chosen for this study as a data collection method since we think it is more beneficial comparing to other types of questionnaires. For the purpose of this research, the primary data was obtained through structured questionnaire, which the copies were completed by the respondents (customer of QSRs).

### **Instrument Design**

The instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into six (6) sections (section A-F) containing twenty-four (24) items questions in all. Section A has six (6) questions on the demographic's characteristics of the participating customers of QSRs in Port Harcourt. In section B, four (4) items for service experience. Section C and D has three (3) items for brand engagement and four (4) items for word of mouth communication respectively. A 5-point Likert measurement scale will be used in weighting the responses.

### **Operational Measurement of Variable**

For the questionnaire in this study, all the variables (service experience, emotional experience, entertainment experience, brand engagement and word of mouth communication) were measured using ordinal scale; using a 5-point Likert scale format (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The Likert-type scale of measuring variables was chosen because it is easy to construct; takes much less time; is considered more reliable (Kothari, 2017).

In this study, brand experience is the predictor variable which was operationalized using service experience, emotional experience, entertainment experience (adapted from Brakus et al (2009) and Prentice et al 2019). The dependent variable of customer behavioural intentions was measured in terms of brand engagement and positive word of mouth communications (adapted from Prentice et al 2019; Wu & Wang, 2011 respectively).

### **Validity and Reliability**

**Validity** of an instrument is where an instrument is able to measure what it is purported to measure. To establish validity of the instrument, drafted copies of the questionnaire were submitted to the supervisor who confirmed it face and content validity after series of corrections.

**Reliability** refers to the consistency of measurement and is frequently assessed using the test-retest reliability method (Saunders et al., 2009). Reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha test with a threshold of 0.7. Nunnally (1978) provided and accepted 0.70 benchmark for measuring instruments using Cronbach Alpha. The value of .818 indicates that the instrument is internally consistent (see Table 1).

<b>Table 1 Reliability Statistics</b>		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.818	.807	11

### Methods of Data Analysis

This study is aimed at examining the effect of brand experience on customers' behavioural intentions in the QSRs in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Based on this, subjecting the stated hypothesised relationships requires analyses which was carried out using Simple Regression Analysis and assisted by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Simple Regression Analysis was employed to determine the magnitude of the effect of the dimensions of brand experience on measures of customers' behavioural intentions towards QSRs in Port Harcourt.

### Analyses and Results

#### Analysis of Questionnaire

Table 2 and Table 3 below are used to analyse the questionnaire in terms of distribution and demographic profile of respondents respectively.

**Table 2 Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval**

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent
Distributed	138	100%
Not retrieved	15	33.33 %
Retrieved	92	66.67%
Useful response	92	66.67%
Not used	-	NIL

Data presentation in Table 2 shows that one hundred and thirty-eight questionnaires (138) representing (100%) were administered, ninety two (92) copies (66.67%) were retrieved while 46 copies (33.33%) were not retrieved. The ninety-two (92) copies representing 66.67% were all useful and therefore used for statistical analysis. Data collected from respondents were statistically treated as indicated on the table below:

**Table 3: Demographic profile of respondents**

S/No	Demographic variables	No	Percent
1	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	42	45.65
	Female	50	54.39
	Total	92	100.00
2	<b>Age</b>		
	< 20 years	3	3.26
	20 – 29 years	45	48.91
	30 – 39 years	29	31.52
	> 40 years	15	16.31
Total	92	100.00	
3	<b>Highest Education Qualification</b>		
	FSCL	7	7.6
	SSCE/GCC	20	21.73
	HND/B.Sc	49	53.26
	MA/M.Sc/MBA	13	14.13
	Ph.D	3	3.28
Total	92	100.00	
4	<b>Number of years of patronage</b>		
	<2yrs	12	13.04
	2-4yrs	40	43.47
	5-8yrs	26	28.26
	9yrs>	14	15.23
Total	92	100.00	

Table 3 above shows the information on demographic profile of respondents. The table shows that 42 respondents (45.65%) were male while 50 respondents (54.39%) were female. This implies that female respondents were of the majority.

The information on age brackets of the respondents in section 2 of Table 3 above shows that 3 respondents (3.26%) was less than 20 years, 45 respondents (48.91%) were within 20 – 29 years, 29 respondents (31.52%) were within 30 – 39 years while 15 respondents (16.31%) were greater than 40 years. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within 20-29 years.

Section 3 of Table 3 above shows information on the respondents' level of education. They were represented as follows: FSLC (7) (7.6%), SSCE/GCE (20) (21.73%), while HND/B.SC (49) (53.26%), MA/MSC/MBA (13) (14.13%) and Ph.D (3)(3.28) From the information it shows that respondents with HND/B.Sc are of the majority.

Section five of Table 3 records the number of years you have patronized domestic airline. The representation are as follows; <2yearas (12) (13.04%), 2-4years (40) (43.47%), 5-8years (26)(28.26%), >9years (14)(15.23%). From the information it shows that respondents who have worked for 2-4 years are of majority.

The Table 3 shows the distribution of questionnaire to respondents and retrieval. Three hundred and twenty-three questionnaire were administered, three hundred and eight (308) copies (96%) were retrieved, 15 (4%) copies distributed questionnaire were not retrieved. Three hundred and eight questionnaires were useful, and 0 questionnaires were not used. Data collected from respondents were statistically treated as indicated on the table below:

### UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The elements in the study were individually analysed with the use of descriptive statistics as shown below:

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics on items of service experience**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The QSR offers timely service	92	4.4891	.54460
The QSR staff are very helpful and friendly	92	4.3370	.57945
In this QSR prompt services are rendered by order takers	92	4.2065	.65529
Quality of service here is great when compared with other QSRs around	92	4.0870	.79355
Valid N (listwise)	92		

Information on Table 4 above indicates the statistical result of service experience of Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) studied in Rivers State through the application of descriptive statistics with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). All the mean scores on the items were greater than 3.9. This is an indication that respondents generally agreed on the items concerning their preferred QSR offering timely service, staff being helpful and friendly together with rendering of prompt services at the QSRs. The standard deviations were quite low indicating that the responses were not far from each other. The grand mean of  $3.9 > 3.0$  is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale. This implies that respondents did not generally agree on all the items of service experience and thus affirmed that responses to services rendered in the QSRs enhanced their feelings in a positive way.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics on items of brand engagement**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
When it is time to dine, I think about this QSR brand	92	4.0326	.70245
I feel very positive when I am patronising this QSR	92	4.1087	.67052

Patronizing this QSR stimulates my interest to learn more about this brand of restaurant	92	4.0761	.75932
Valid N (listwise)	92		

Information on Table 5 above indicates the statistical result of brand engagement of Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) studied in Rivers State through the application of descriptive statistics with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). All the mean scores on the items were greater than 3.9. This is an indication that respondents generally agreed on the items concerning their preferred QSR. The means scores suggest that the customers are always thinking about the restaurants, feel very positive in patronizing the QSRs and also being stimulated to have interest in learning more about the QSRs. The standard deviations were quite low indicating that the responses were not far from each other. The grand mean of  $3.9 > 3.0$  is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale. This implies that respondents did not generally agree on all the items of brand engagement.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics on items of word-of-mouth communication**

#### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will recommend this QSR to my friends and relatives	92	4.2935	.54547
I say positive things about my preferred QSR brand to other people	92	4.2826	.58038
I will recommend this QSR brand to anyone who seeks my advice	92	4.2826	.59901
I will write positive review about this QSR on social media if the opportunity arises	92	4.2065	.60289
Valid N (listwise)	92		

Information on Table 6 above indicates the statistical result of word-of-mouth communication of Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) studied in Rivers State through the application of descriptive statistics with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). All the mean scores on the items were greater than 3.9. This is an indication that respondents generally agreed on the items concerning their preferred QSR in terms of telling friends and family about the brand as well as saying positive things about the QSR to other people. The standard deviations were quite low indicating that the responses were not far from each other. The grand mean of  $3.9 > 3.0$  is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale. This implies that respondents generally agreed on all the items of word-of-mouth communication.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Correlation Analysis**

**DECISION RULE**

If  $PV < 0.05$  = Reject  $H_0$   
 If  $PV > 0.05$  = Accept  $H_0$

**4.4.1 Effect of service experience on brand engagement**

$H_{01}$ : Service experience does not have positive and significant effect on brand engagement

$H_{A1}$ : Service experience has positive and significant effect on brand engagement

**Table 7-9 Linear Regression Correlation Analysis showing the effect of service experience on brand engagement**

**Table 7: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.676 <sup>a</sup>	.457	.451	.52051
a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Experience				

<b>Table 8 ANOVA<sup>a</sup></b>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.519	1	20.519	75.735	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	24.383	90	.271		
	Total	44.902	91			
a. Dependent Variable: Brand Engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Experience						

<b>Table 9: Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.118	.453		.261	.794
	Service Experience	.872	.100	.676	8.703	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Brand Engagement						

The Table 7 shows that R is .676, R Square is .457 and adjusted R square is .451. This is an indication that 45.7% of the variance in brand engagement can be explained by the changes in

independent variables of service experience. As a general rule, this model is considered as not being a ‘good fit’ as this, multiple regression model is not able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: brand engagement (Moosa & Hassan, 2015).

The ANOVA Table 8 also shows that  $F = 75.731$  &  $p = .000 < 0.05$ .  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ , indicating significant relationship between the constructs. The result of the regression analysis (Table 9) shows that service brand experience made positive and significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ( $B = .676$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. It means therefore that service experience has positive and significant effect on brand engagement. Accordingly, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis;

HA<sub>1</sub>: Service experience has positive and significant effect on brand engagement

**Effect of service experience on word-of-mouth communication**

HO<sub>2</sub>: Service experience does not have positive and significant effect on word of mouth communication

HA<sub>2</sub>: Service experience has positive and significant effect on word of mouth communication

**Table 10-12 Linear Regression Correlation Analysis showing the effect of service experience on word-of-mouth communication**

Table 10: Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.732 <sup>a</sup>	.536	.531	.37357
a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Experience				

Table 12: ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.516	1	14.516	104.020	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	12.560	90	.140		
	Total	27.076	91			
a. Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth Communication						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Experience						

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.001	.325		3.079	.003
	Service Experience	.733	.072	.732	10.199	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth Communication

The Table 10 shows that R is .732, R Square is .536 and adjusted R square is .531. This is an indication that 45.7% of the variance in word-of-mouth communication can be explained by the changes in independent variables of service experience. As a general rule, this model is considered as not being a 'good fit' as this, multiple regression model is not able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: word of mouth communication (Moosa & Hassan, 2015).

The ANOVA Table (Table 11) also shows that  $F = 104.020$  &  $p = .000 < 0.05$ .  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ , indicating significant relationship between the constructs. The result of the regression analysis (Table 12) shows that service experience made positive and significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ( $B = .732$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. It means therefore that service experience has positive and significant effect on word-of-mouth communication. Accordingly, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

HA<sub>2</sub>: Service experience has positive and significant effect on word of mouth communication.

## Discussion of Findings

### Relationship between service experience and brand engagement

The findings of this study show that service experience has great effect on brand engagement of QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B = .676$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Ali, et al, (2016).

Service experienced by customers of QSRs has the capacity to engender brand engagement. For any organization to have a competitive advantage, the quality of service experience must take centre stage. According to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (1994), service experience plays a critical role in brand image enhancement. Na et al. (1999) argue that image cannot be measured unless customer perception about the product image and brand image is established. Furthermore, Yi (1990) argued that customer satisfaction is influenced by experiences and expectations with service performance and quality of the services.

### Relationship between service experience and word of moth communication

The findings of this study show that service experience has great effect on brand engagement of QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B = .732$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Ali, et al, (2016). A good service experience in a QSR has the capacity to enhance the brand image of the QSR. As noted by Kim and Kim (2005), "brand image and service quality perceptions share too many features" (p. 556). Aydin and Ozer (2005) found

that perceived service quality directly determines the perception of brand image. A customer who experiences quality service will be easily satisfied and thus be in a position to tell family and friends about the QSR.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study examined the importance of service brand experience towards customers' behavioural intentions in QSRs operating in Port Harcourt. From the customers' behavioural perspective, the results of the empirical analyses have revealed that service experience is very important factor in contributing to the customers' behavioural intentions in terms of brand engagement and word of mouth communications. It is believed that these findings are very important to both academic researcher and hospitality practitioners with regard to behavioural intentions of customers towards QSRs.

Accordingly, therefore, this study provides a better understanding of customers' behavioural intentions towards the brand experience offered by managers of QSRs in order the achievement of marketing objectives. Thus, the empirical evidence offered by this study offers actionable information to all managers and owners of QSRs on the fact that as a service-oriented industry concerted effort should be made towards building a memorable brand experience that is appealing to the target market.

It is therefore safe to conclude that consumers' experiential responses towards brands helps in developing their brand preferences that in turn influence brand repurchase intention and brand referral. The model therefore offers managers a new perspective for building strong brands that are able to gain consumer preferences. Consequently, the findings of the study lends support to the self-regulatory focus theory which is a theory of motivation because it influences consumers cognitive processes, the emotions experienced and the behaviours adopted.

## **Study Implications**

This research has several significant implications for hospitality marketing theory and practice, as it aims to contribute to areas of brand experience management and marketing. Theoretically, the study provides insight as to the effects of brand experience on customers' behavioural intentions. The research aims to contribute to service brand experience management literature by investigating how service brand experience enhances the behavioural dispositions of customers towards domestic QSRs in a university community in Nigeria.

Managerially, QSR marketing practitioners can benefit from further understanding the potential effects or consequences of enhancing service brand experience in their restaurants for their customers. Top executives in the QSR organisations: this study will help to broaden the knowledge managers have on service brand experience and customers' behavioural intentions towards their organisations. This study will help managers to develop brand experience strategies needed and capable of enhancing positive behavioural intentions towards the QSRs and by extension the achievement of overall organizational effectiveness.

Customers in the food and beverage sector: This study is expected to enlarge the knowledge of customers of QSRs on how to identify QSRs with credible brand experience attributes. This knowledge will enhance their ability to make purchase decisions based on their preferences and choice. Academicians: The study will also be an important resource for academicians and

future researchers who may wish to investigate issues relating to QSR brand experience attributes and customers' behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry.

### Recommendations

The statistical result of hypotheses H1 and H2 shows that service experience has strong, positive and significant effect on two measures of customer behavioural intentions (brand engagement and word of mouth communication). It is therefore recommended that the owners/managers of QSRs should develop a robust service quality marketing strategy capable of enhancing the service experience of the QSRs

### Contribution to knowledge

The study provides an example of using the Service Brand Experience-Customer Behavioural intentions (SBE-CBI) model to empirically test the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variables. This is achieved in a single model in the context of QSRs in Rivers State. Another major contribution to knowledge is that the empirical research effort captured a very important dimension of brand experience (service experience) in a single model.

### Areas for Further Study

Only QSRs operating in the university business environment in the hospitality industry in Rivers State were involved. It is expected that future research should broaden the organisational scope to include other service providers in the tourism industry like the airlines and hotels.

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