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## **BRAND EXPERIENCE AND BRAND LOYALTY IN QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE**

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**Osi, Vine Chinwe<sup>1</sup> and \*Ekeke, John Ndubueze<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1&2</sup> 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: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9067-3780>

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### **Abstract**

In the increasingly competitive Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) industry, understanding how brand experience shapes brand loyalty is essential for sustained growth. This empirical study investigates the effect of four dimensions of brand experience: sensory, emotional, intellectual, and relational on brand loyalty in QSRs with customer satisfaction acting as a mediating variable within Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Anchored on Experiential Marketing Theory and Brand Equity Theory, the study employed a quantitative survey design and collected data from 400 QSR customers using structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis to determine the influence of the dimensions of brand experience on brand loyalty. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) and the Partial Correlation were used to test mediation role of customer satisfaction. Results indicate that sensory and emotional brand experiences had little but significant effects on brand loyalty, intellectual and relational brand loyalty had strong but significant effect on brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction positively and significantly mediated the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. The study concluded that determining the effect of brand experience dimensions by service brand managers is pivotal to evaluating customers' behavioural intentions towards service brands. The study highlights the importance of designing emotionally and socially engaging brand experiences to foster long-term guest relationships. Practical implications for QSR operators and future research directions are discussed.

### **Keywords:**

*Brand experience, guest satisfaction, brand loyalty, quick service restaurants, experiential marketing, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.*

### **1. Introduction**

The quick service restaurant (QSR) industry plays a pivotal role in the hospitality sector, offering convenience, affordability, and speed in food delivery. In urban centres like Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the proliferation of QSRs has heightened competition, compelling operators to move beyond functional service delivery toward creating memorable brand experiences. Contemporary marketing thought emphasizes that successful brands do not merely

deliver products, they create meaningful experiences that resonate with consumers emotionally, socially, and personally (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999).

Brand experience has emerged as a multidimensional construct that captures the holistic interaction between customers and brands. These experiences are evoked through brand-related stimuli and manifest across six core dimensions: sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioural, relational, and personal (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010; Iglesias et al., 2011). In the context of QSRs, where service encounters are frequent yet brief, designing rich brand experiences becomes vital for driving satisfaction and cultivating long-term customer loyalty.

Although studies have explored the role of brand experience in consumer behaviour, much of the existing research is situated in Western or Asian contexts (Khan & Rahman, 2017; Kim & Ko, 2012). There remains a gap in empirical evidence from African cities like Port Harcourt, where cultural values, service expectations, and consumption patterns may alter how brand experiences influence outcomes such as guest satisfaction and brand loyalty.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

Despite the growth of the QSR industry in Port Harcourt, many outlets continue to face customer churn, declining loyalty, and inconsistent service ratings. While pricing and convenience remain important, they are no longer sufficient to ensure guest retention in a saturated market. There is limited empirical research examining how the various dimensions of brand experience influence key outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty in the local context. Without a deeper understanding of these experiential factors, QSRs may miss critical opportunities to build enduring relationships with guests and improve performance outcomes.

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

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of brand experience dimensions on brand loyalty in quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the influence of sensory brand experience on brand loyalty.
2. Ascertain the effect of emotional brand experience on and brand loyalty.
3. Determine the effect of intellectual brand experiences on guest satisfaction and brand loyalty.
4. Ascertain the effect of relational brand experience on brand loyalty.
5. Determine the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

Brand experience has emerged as a pivotal construct in contemporary marketing, particularly in service-dominated sectors such as hospitality and quick service restaurants (QSRs). It refers to the multidimensional and subjective consumer responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, encompassing sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral domains (Brakus et al., 2009). Unlike traditional brand constructs that emphasize objective product attributes, functionality, or price-performance metrics, brand experience centers on how consumers perceive, engage

with, and emotionally respond to a brand across various touchpoints (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). This shift from a transactional to an experiential paradigm is especially relevant in the QSR sector, where customer interaction is often fast-paced, repetitive, and heavily reliant on experiential cues such as ambience, staff behavior, service consistency, and brand personality (Berry et al., 2002).

### 2.1.1 Dimensions of Brand Experience

Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) laid the groundwork for understanding the components of brand experience. These modules include five key dimensions: sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and relational. Over time, a sixth dimension: personal experience, has been introduced to reflect how brand interactions contribute to self-identity and personal meaning (Iglesias et al., 2011; Khan & Fatma, 2017). Each of these dimensions offers a unique pathway through which consumers form perceptions, develop attachments, and ultimately decide whether to remain loyal to a brand.

**Sensory Brand Experience:** Sensory experience involves stimuli that engage the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In QSRs, these cues are often reflected in visual branding elements (e.g., logo, menu design, uniform), store layout and decor, ambient music, aroma of food, and even the texture of packaging. Sensory experiences are particularly important for creating instant impressions, enhancing memorability, and evoking emotional reactions (Nysveen et al., 2013; Hultén, 2011).

**Emotional Brand Experience** Emotional experience pertains to the feelings and affective states triggered during interactions with a brand. These include emotions such as happiness, nostalgia, excitement, or comfort, which influence how customers evaluate a service and whether they return. Emotional experiences tend to build stronger affective bonds with brands, making them an essential driver of loyalty in competitive environments like Port Harcourt's QSR market (Kim & Ko, 2012; Tsai, 2005).

**Intellectual Brand Experience** Intellectual experience stimulates a consumer's thinking and curiosity. It includes the mental engagement derived from interacting with innovative menus, digital ordering kiosks, gamified promotions, or educational brand storytelling. This cognitive stimulation enriches the customer's perception of the brand's creativity and modernity, which may influence satisfaction and brand preference (Gentile et al., 2007; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

**Relational Brand Experience:** Relational experience involves social interactions that occur between the customer and the brand, and among customers themselves. In QSRs, this can include friendly and personalized service by staff, a sense of community in the outlet, or shared values expressed through brand activism or community programs. These relational elements deepen trust and foster emotional ties (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013).

These dimensions collectively influence brand loyalty, serving as core variables in the value-creation and retention process for QSRs.

### 2.1.2 Customer Satisfaction as a mediating variable

Customer satisfaction is generally defined as the emotional and cognitive evaluation of a service experience, based on the extent to which expectations are met or exceeded (Oliver, 1999). In service environments like QSRs, satisfaction is shaped by both tangible cues (e.g., product quality, service speed) and intangible experiences (e.g., atmosphere, employee courtesy, brand image). Satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend the brand, and overlook minor service lapses, making satisfaction a key antecedent of brand loyalty (Nam et al., 2011; Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

When customers experience a QSR brand (through service speed, good food taste, convenience, etc.,) their perceptions are shaped automatically. If the food is good such as a tasty Nigerian jollof rice bought at a QSR, the customers will be happy. This emotional feeling results in customer satisfaction which in turn engenders brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty, on the other hand, refers to a customer's favorable attitude and behavioral commitment to repurchase or consistently patronize a brand over time. It is often expressed through repeated purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching, even in the face of competitive offers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Loyalty emerges not just from functional satisfaction but also from emotional bonds, trust, self-brand congruence, and social identification (Dick & Basu, 1994; Keller, 2001). In highly competitive and saturated markets such as Port Harcourt, cultivating loyalty through immersive brand experiences is essential for long-term survival and profitability.

## 2.2 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two key theories that provide a solid foundation for understanding the relationships between brand experience, guest satisfaction, and brand loyalty in the context of QSRs: Experiential Marketing Theory and Brand Equity Theory.

### 2.2.1 Experiential Marketing Theory

Proposed by Schmitt (1999), Experiential Marketing Theory emphasizes that consumers are not just rational decision-makers but emotional beings who seek memorable and engaging experiences with brands. Unlike traditional marketing approaches focused on product features and benefits, experiential marketing centers on creating rich, multisensory, and emotionally charged brand encounters. The theory introduces five strategic experiential modules: sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and relational, which directly inform the dimensions of brand experience explored in this study.

In QSRs, experiential marketing translates into efforts to design environments, services, and communications that appeal holistically to customers. For instance, a restaurant's décor, music, menu creativity, staff friendliness, and brand story all contribute to the consumer's overall experience. By engaging customers across these dimensions, QSRs can trigger emotional and cognitive responses that lead to satisfaction and eventually loyalty (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007). Experiential Marketing Theory thus provides a suitable lens for exploring how specific aspects of brand experience influence customer attitudes and behaviors.

Therefore, Experiential Marketing Theory offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing how brands can create meaningful and memorable experiences that drive customer retention.

In the context of the hospitality industry, where guest satisfaction and brand loyalty are paramount, applying experiential marketing principles can significantly enhance customer retention. The current study builds on this theory to explore how brand experience influences customer retention, providing valuable insights for both marketing scholars and practitioners in the hospitality sector.

### 2.2.2 Brand Equity Theory

Keller's (1993) Brand Equity Theory explains how strong brand relationships are built through consumer perceptions, associations, and experiences. It suggests that when customers consistently encounter positive brand experiences, they develop favorable brand associations, increased trust, and greater brand equity which in turn enhance brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Brand Equity Theory aligns closely with the objectives of this study by emphasizing the long-term value generated when consumers perceive a brand as meaningful and personally relevant. In QSR settings, where brand choices are frequent and competitive pressure is high, developing strong emotional and experiential connections can boost perceived brand equity and improve customer retention (Keller, 2001; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

These two theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining how various dimensions of brand experience contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in dynamic service environments like the fast-food sector in Port Harcourt.

## 2.3 Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Multiple studies across different service contexts have empirically confirmed the influence of brand experience on satisfaction and loyalty. Brakus et al. (2009), in a foundational study, established that sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral experiences significantly influence customer attitudes and loyalty. Khan and Rahman (2017) extended this by showing that emotional and relational experiences are particularly influential in hospitality, where service encounters are frequent and affect-laden.

In the restaurant industry, Iglesias et al. (2011) found that brand experience dimensions positively affect satisfaction and loyalty, with emotional and relational components being the strongest predictors. Kim and Ko (2012), studying luxury retail, reported that intellectual and sensory experiences also contributed significantly to satisfaction and brand equity.

Ramaseshan and Stein (2014) examined the retail service industry and concluded that experiential components enhance perceived value and commitment. Similarly, Nysveen et al. (2013) found that brand experience fosters brand personality perceptions, which mediate the experience-loyalty relationship.

Moreira, et al. (2017) conducted a study titled Influence of sensory stimuli on brand experience, brand equity and purchase intention. The study aimed to explore how sensory stimuli impact brand experience, which subsequently affects brand equity and purchase intention. The authors developed a model to assess the mediating roles of brand experience and brand equity in the relationship between sensory stimulation and purchase intention. The study adopted a quantitative research design using an online survey to collect data from 302 customers of a catering brand. A convenience sampling technique was applied, and data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method. Findings showed

that sensory stimuli significantly influenced brand experience, which in turn strengthened brand equity and positively impacted purchase intentions. This implies that an enhanced sensory experience fosters a stronger emotional connection, resulting in greater customer loyalty. Although the study did not directly address brand loyalty, the strong relationship between sensory experience and purchase intention indicates that sensory factors play a crucial role in influencing customers' repeated engagement and loyalty. The researchers recommended that brands, particularly in the hospitality sector, should integrate sensory marketing strategies to foster brand loyalty.

Ong, et al. (2018) investigated the Impact of brand experience on loyalty. The primary objective of the research was to determine how different components of brand experience (sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual) contribute to customer loyalty. A survey design was used, targeting 228 customers from successful small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the restaurant industry. The sampling technique was purposive, focusing on customers who had previous interactions with the selected brands. A structured questionnaire was the main instrument used to gather data, and analysis was conducted using multiple regression techniques. The results revealed that sensory and affective experiences had the most substantial impact on true brand loyalty, indicating that customers' sensory perceptions significantly influence their loyalty towards a brand. The authors concluded that businesses should focus on creating multi-dimensional brand experiences to sustain loyalty and enhance brand equity.

Zha, et al. (2024) conducted a study titled Examining the Impact of Sensory Brand Experience on Brand Loyalty. The research aimed to assess the effect of five sensory cues (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and taste) on brand loyalty through mediating variables such as customer satisfaction, brand attachment, and customer lovemarks. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from 512 Chinese consumers and qualitative insights from 10 in-depth interviews and 4 focus group discussions. The sampling technique was multi-stage, targeting consumers with consistent brand interactions. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for the quantitative aspect and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The findings indicated that each sensory cue significantly impacted brand loyalty, but not all dimensions of customer satisfaction and brand attachment led to loyalty. Interestingly, employee empathy negatively moderated the relationship between sensory brand experience and customer lovemarks, suggesting that overly empathetic interactions might reduce the effect of sensory experiences on brand loyalty. The researchers recommended that hospitality businesses should optimize sensory cues to create a holistic experience that builds long-term loyalty, while ensuring that employee interactions do not overshadow the sensory impact.

Huang and Chen (2022) conducted research in Taiwan's chain restaurants to analyze how different aspects of emotional experience affect brand loyalty through customer engagement. Their study, utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with data from 280 customers, identified that emotional engagement, a dimension of customer engagement, served as the primary mediator for fostering brand loyalty. While affective experiences were found to be a significant driver of emotional engagement, sensory experiences primarily impacted cognitive engagement. Their findings suggest that enhancing customers' emotional engagement through tailored experiences can significantly deepen brand loyalty, making it a crucial focus area for restaurant managers seeking to build sustainable relationships with their clientele. Consequently, they recommend that restaurants invest in creating emotionally stimulating environments to maximize customer engagement and loyalty.

Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) extended this line of inquiry to the smartphone industry, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to examine how brand experience (BE) influences brand loyalty through the mediation of emotional brand attachment (EBA) dimensions such as brand passion, self-brand connection, and brand affection. The study, which involved 278 respondents from Lebanon, employed mediation analysis and revealed that emotional brand attachment plays a critical role in transforming brand experiences into long-lasting loyalty. They suggested that brands should focus on enhancing experiential marketing strategies to build deeper emotional connections, which in turn foster strong loyalty. They recommend leveraging emotional brand attachment dimensions like brand passion and affection to solidify consumer-brand relationships, especially in highly competitive markets.

Safeer, et al. (2021) conducted a study titled *The Influence of Brand Experience on Brand Authenticity and Brand Love: An Empirical Study from Asian Consumers' Perspective* to examine the effects of multidimensional brand experiences (i.e., behavioral, intellectual, affective, and sensory) on brand authenticity and brand love among Asian consumers. Using a sample of 418 respondents across 13 Asian countries, the study applied partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses. Their results revealed that intellectual experiences, alongside behavioral experiences, did not have a direct significant impact on brand love, while sensory and affective experiences had a strong positive impact on brand love. However, intellectual experiences positively influenced brand authenticity, which in turn positively influenced brand love. Although the direct impact of intellectual experiences on brand loyalty was not significant, the study highlighted that brand authenticity serves as a critical mediator between intellectual experiences and loyalty-related outcomes. Thus, the study suggests that fostering a sense of brand authenticity through intellectual engagement may lead to increased brand loyalty indirectly, even if the direct effects are not immediately apparent.

Liu, et al. (2020) explored the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty in the context of upscale hotels in Taiwan in their study titled *The impact of experience on brand loyalty: mediating effect of images of Taiwan hotels*. Using a sample of 334 guests, the study found that intellectual experiences significantly contributed to brand loyalty, as evidenced by a positive correlation ( $r = .077$ ,  $t = 7.481$ ). The researchers defined intellectual experience as any hotel service or attribute that stimulates guests' thoughts, curiosity, and imagination, such as art exhibitions, unique decor, or engaging storytelling. Their findings showed that intellectually stimulating elements like the hotel's décor and storytelling were positively associated with guests' willingness to remain loyal even when confronted with negative information or price increases. The study also revealed that brand image served as a partial mediator between intellectual experience and brand loyalty, suggesting that the cognitive impressions created by intellectual experiences helped reinforce a positive brand image, which, in turn, fostered stronger loyalty among guests. This study provides valuable insights into how hospitality brands can leverage intellectual experiences to enhance brand loyalty, particularly by integrating thoughtful and imaginative elements into their service offerings.

In contrast, Pina and Dias (2020) conducted a study titled *"The Influence of Brand Experiences on Consumer-Based Brand Equity"* to investigate the impact of brand experiences on consumer-based brand equity using a sample of 317 respondents who had consumed Nespresso products in Lisbon, Portugal. The study employed partial least squares (PLS) modeling to analyze the data and found that intellectual experiences had a weak and negative impact on brand loyalty. The researchers suggested that, in the context of Nespresso, intellectual experiences, which aimed to appeal to consumers' intellect and creativity, were less relevant

due to the nature of coffee consumption, which is primarily associated with sensory indulgence rather than cognitive stimulation. As a result, the study concluded that intellectual experiences may not always translate into brand loyalty, especially in product categories where sensory and emotional benefits are more strongly desired by consumers. This finding highlights the importance of context in determining the effectiveness of intellectual experiences on brand loyalty, as not all products or services benefit equally from cognitive engagement

The study by Husain, et al. (2022) aimed to investigate the impact of brand experience, brand resonance, and brand trust on luxury consumption in emerging economies, particularly in India. The research employed a survey distributed to 413 luxury brand consumers across four major metropolitan cities, using Smart-PLS for data analysis. The findings revealed that both brand experience and brand resonance significantly contribute to luxury consumption, with consumer involvement acting as a mediator. Additionally, the study highlighted the moderating effects of gender and generation on these relationships. The authors recommended that luxury brands enhance relational experiences to foster deeper consumer trust and engagement, aligning closely with the hypothesized relationship that relational experiences strengthen brand loyalty.

Framed within consumer-brand relationship theory, Ferreira, et al. (2019) examined the pathway from brand experience to customer loyalty through the mediating role of brand love. Data were collected from 560 customers using face-to-face questionnaires in a retail fashion context, with structural equation modeling employed for analysis. Results indicated that sensory and affective dimensions of brand experience significantly influence brand love, which in turn enhances customer loyalty, both directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction. The authors stress the necessity of understanding the interplay between brand experience and emotional connections in building lasting loyalty. This aligns with the current hypothesized relationship, suggesting that positive relational experiences foster brand loyalty through emotional attachment.

Rasool, et al. (2021) investigated the relational dynamics between customer engagement, brand experience, and customer loyalty in the banking sector. A sample of 322 valid responses was analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. The findings confirm a positive influence of brand experience on customer loyalty, asserting that a responsive and engaging brand enhances the overall experience for customers, thereby increasing loyalty. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of customer engagement as a precursor to favorable brand experiences. The authors advocate for banks to focus on nurturing relational experiences to strengthen loyalty among customers. This reinforces the hypothesized relationship by illustrating how relational experiences are pivotal in cultivating brand loyalty.

From the forgoing, the following hypotheses were developed;

- 1) H1: Sensory brand experience does not have a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
- 2) H2: Emotional brand experience does not have a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
- 3) H3: Intellectual brand experience does not have a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
- 4) H4: Relational brand experience does not have a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
- 5) H5: Guest satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty

## 2.4 Research Model

Based on insights from the reviewed literature and theoretical frameworks, this study proposes a conceptual model that links the multidimensional construct of brand experience to guest satisfaction and, ultimately, to brand loyalty. The model posits that the six dimensions of brand experience: sensory, emotional, intellectual, and relational, serve as antecedents to customer satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction is expected to mediate the relationship between these brand experience dimensions and brand loyalty. This mediation pathway reflects the experiential marketing and brand equity perspectives that satisfaction is a critical outcome of brand interaction and a strong predictor of future loyalty behaviors. The model provides a testable structure for exploring how brand experience operates in the Port Harcourt QSR environment and how it influences customer retention through satisfaction-driven loyalty.

## 2.5 Literature Gap

Despite the growing global interest in brand experience research, significant gaps remain, particularly in the context of Port Harcourt. First, there exists a contextual gap as most studies are based in developed economies, with limited focus on African settings. Even within Nigeria, empirical investigations rarely address how brand experience plays out in Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs), and fewer still consider the unique dynamics of the hospitality environment in Rivers State. Second, there is a lack of dimensional clarity while previous research affirms the influence of brand experience on satisfaction and loyalty, few studies provide a detailed analysis of how each specific dimension contributes to these outcomes in QSR contexts. Third, although mediation pathways such as the role of satisfaction in linking brand experience to loyalty have been theorized, there is limited empirical validation of these relationships in under-studied urban markets like Port Harcourt. This study seeks to address these gaps by empirically examining how the dimensions of brand experience influence customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in QSRs within Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey design to empirically examine the impact of brand experience dimensions on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in quick service restaurants (QSRs) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This approach is suitable for testing hypothesized relationships using statistical techniques and enables the generalization of findings across the QSR context.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population consists of customers who patronize selected QSRs operating in Port Harcourt. These include popular outlets such as Kilimanjaro, Genesis, Crunchies, and Big Treat. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to select respondents due to the accessibility of participants within high-traffic QSR locations. A total sample of 400 customers was targeted to ensure adequate representation and statistical power for multivariate analysis.

### 3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising four sections:

Section A: Demographic data (age, gender, education, frequency of visits, etc.)

Section B: Brand experience dimensions (adapted from Brakus et al., 2009 and Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010) using a 5-point Likert scale.

Section C: Guest satisfaction (adapted from Oliver, 1999).

Section D: Brand loyalty (adapted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 QSR customers in a pilot study to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity. Items with low reliability scores were revised or removed.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Construct validity was ensured through the use of previously validated scales from existing studies. Content validity was checked through expert review. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs achieving values above the 0.70 threshold, indicating acceptable reliability.

### 3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) were used to summarize demographic and general response patterns. Inferential analyses were conducted using Multiple Regression Analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient to test the relationships among variables and evaluate the measurement and structural model. Mediation effects of customer satisfaction were tested using PPMC and Partial Correlation.

## 4. Analysis and Results

A total of 400 valid responses were collected from patrons of selected QSRs in Port Harcourt. The distribution of the data is presented below.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	208	52
	Female	192	48
Age	18–24	120	30
	25–34	180	45
	35–44	60	15
	45 and above	40	10
Education Level	Secondary	60	15
	Bachelor's Degree	240	60
	Master's Degree	100	25
Visit Frequency	Weekly	160	40
	Monthly	140	35
	Occasionally	100	25

## 4.2 Analyses and Results

### 4.2.1 Descriptive Overview

The respondents in this study are predominantly young, with 75% being under the age of 35. They are also well-educated, as 85% possess tertiary-level qualifications. Furthermore, 75% of them are regular patrons of quick service restaurants (QSRs), visiting either weekly or monthly (see Table 1). These characteristics position them as an ideal demographic for examining brand experience, given their consistent engagement with the QSR sector and their likely exposure to a range of service interactions.

### 4.2.2 Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics

The average responses for all dimensions of brand experience, as well as for customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, were above 3.80 on a 5-point scale. This reflects a generally positive perception of QSR services among the participants. Notably, emotional and relational experiences recorded the highest mean values, suggesting that the emotional tone of the service and the quality of customer relationships are particularly strong in the current QSR landscape.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sensory Brand Experience	3.84	0.72
Emotional Brand Experience	4.15	0.68
Intellectual Brand Experience	4.02	0.70
Relational Brand Experience	4.09	0.65
Customer Satisfaction	4.20	0.66
Brand Loyalty	4.05	0.74

## 4.4 TEST OF HYPOTHESES

### 4.4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

#### *DECISION RULE*

If  $PV < 0.05$  = Reject  $H_0$

$PV > 0.05$  = Accept  $H_0$

**Table 3-5 Multiple Regression Analysis showing the effect of brand experience dimensions on brand loyalty**

**Table 3:** Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.959 <sup>a</sup>	.921	.917	.17377

a. Predictors: (Constant), Relational Brand Experience, Sensory Brand Experience, Emotional Brand Experience, Intellectual Brand Experience

**Table 4:** ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.449	4	7.612	252.102	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2.627	87	.030		
	Total	33.076	91			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Relational Brand Experience, Sensory Brand Experience, Emotional Brand Experience, Intellectual Brand Experience

**Table 5:** Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.749	.165		4.550	.000
	Sensory Brand Experience	-.054	.056	-.049	-.967	.041
	Emotional Brand Experience	.046	.072	.044	.640	.000
	Intellectual Brand Experience	.566	.076	.615	7.489	.000
	Relational Brand Experience	.274	.060	.361	4.594	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

For this study, regression analysis was performed to predict the level of customers' brand loyalty based on four independent factors of QSR brand experience. The four independent factors/dimensions of QSR brand experience are: sensory brand experience, emotional brand experience, intellectual brand experience, and relational brand experience.

The Table 3 shows that R is .959, R Square is .921 and adjusted R square is .917. This is an indication that 92.1% of the variance in customers' brand loyalty can be explained by the changes in independent variables of QSR brand experience. As a general rule, this model is considered as a 'good fit' as this, multiple regression model is able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: brand loyalty (Moosa & Hassan, 2015). The ANOVA Test in Table 4 shows that  $F = 252.102$  &  $p = .000 < 0.05$ , indicating significant relationship between the brand experience and brand loyalty.

The result of the regression analysis (Table 5) shows that all the four indicators of QSR brand experience influences customers' brand loyalty by making significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable. The four significant factors are: sensory brand experience (SBE) ( $B = -.049$ ;  $p = .041 < 0.05$ ) emotional brand experience (EBE) ( $B = .044$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ) intellectual brand experience (IBE) ( $B = .615$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ) and relational brand experience (RBE) ( $B = .361$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). The other variables (sensory brand experience and emotional brand experience) made weak but significant contribution.

**4.2.7 Influence of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty**

HO<sub>5</sub>: Customer satisfaction does not significantly influence the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

HA<sub>5</sub>: Customer satisfaction does significantly influence the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Table 6-7 Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis showing the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty

**Table 6 Correlations**

		Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty
Brand Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.857**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
Brand Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.857**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	400

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

**Table 7: Correlations**

Control Variables			Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty
Customer Satisfaction	Brand Experience	Correlation	1.000	.480
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000
		Df	0	89
	Brand Loyalty	Correlation	.480	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.
		Df	89	0

Table 6 Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis and Partial correlation showing the mediating influence of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty in Port Harcourt city of Rivers State. The correlation coefficient (r)=0.857. This is the first test in determining the mediating effect of customer satisfaction in the relationship between the constructs (brand experience and brand loyalty). The second aspect of the test is shown in Table 7 with Partial Correlation with correlation coefficient of .480. Comparing the two correlation coefficients shows that there is a great decrease in the strength of the correlation (from .857 to .480). This suggests that the observed relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty is statistically influenced/mediated by customer satisfaction. Accordingly, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

**4.2.3 Hypothesis Testing and Structural Relationships**

The findings from the structural model shed light on the predictive power of different brand experience dimensions. Firstly, sensory experience has a statistically significant but relatively weak effect on brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.049$ ), indicating that elements like taste of food, colours, ambiance, lighting, and decor, though appreciated, are not the primary drivers of brand loyalty. In the same vein, emotional experience has a much weaker impact ( $\beta = 0.044$ ), emphasizing the lack of positive emotions such as excitement, happiness, and comfort during service delivery. In contrast, both intellectual and relational experiences demonstrate strong direct effects on loyalty ( $\beta = 0.615$  and  $\beta = 0.361$ , respectively). This highlights the effectiveness of personalized services and meaningful interactions in fostering long-term customer commitment. Customer satisfaction itself emerges as a critical factor in brand loyalty, acting as a significant mediator (there is a great decrease in the strength of the correlation from .857 to .480) in the model. This underscores the notion that satisfied guests are more inclined to remain loyal.

#### 4.2.4 Model Explanation ( $R^2$ Values)

The overall model demonstrates robust explanatory power, accounting for 92.1% of the variance in brand loyalty. The  $R^2$  values are considered high within behavioral and social science research, signifying that the brand experience dimensions included in the model effectively capture the factors driving loyalty in QSR settings.

### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

#### 4.3.1. Relationship between sensory experience and brand loyalty

Sensory experiences, while statistically significant, had a relatively weaker effect ( $B=.049$ ;  $p=.000 < 0.05$ ). This suggests that while the physical environment and sensory stimuli are important, they may not be the primary drivers of brand loyalty in the context of QSR in Port Harcourt. The result is consistent with previous studies such as Iglesias et al, (2019) who found that sensory experience positively influenced brand equity and customer satisfactions. What a consumer sees, feels and touch in the marketplace is very important to both the marketer and the consumers. This is because our senses help in shaping customer perceptions, emotions and experiences. All these have implications for customer behavioural intentions towards service brands such as QSRs.

#### 4.3.2. Relationship between emotional experience and brand loyalty

The findings of this study show that emotional experience has great effect on brand loyalty of QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B=.836$ ;  $p=.000 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Ebrahim et al, (2016). The truth is self-evident 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 able to gain consumer preferences through strong emotions. Sit, and Merrilees, (2002) suggested that in order to create extraordinary overall satisfaction, organisations such as shopping centre management may consider designing entertainment that evokes stronger positive emotions to exceed shoppers' consumption motives.

### 4.3.3. Relationship between intellectual experience and brand loyalty

The findings of this study show that intellectual experience has great and significant effect on brand loyalty towards QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B=.615$ ;  $p=.000 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Rieger, et al, (2014). In contrast, Nyseen et al. (2013) found that intellectual experience had no significant influence on brand loyalty in the context of the telecommunications industry. However, Aaker (1989) noted that unique brand experience will serve as a sustainable competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. Experience is what makes customer return, because offerings maybe the same but differences lie in the experience of dining. Secret recipes, order taking, food preparation, and food presentation may help to create an appropriate dining experience for the restaurant brand. Voon, et al (2013) found that food in Malaysia that high food quality is one of the greatest predictors of Malaysian patrons' return visits to restaurants and positive word of mouth. It is based on the foregoing that Oug, et al (2018), argued that "customers who are triggered cognitively in their dining experience consider such experiences worth paying more, sharing the restaurant brand with friends, and visiting again".

### 4.3.4. Relationship between relational experience and brand loyalty

The findings of this study show that relational experience has moderate but significant effect on brand loyalty of QSRs in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B=.361$ ;  $p=.000 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Husain, et al (2022). A good service experience in a QSR has the capacity to enhance the relationship between consumers and the service brand 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 and therefore a study aimed to empirically test this assertion is critical for theory development in this area. A customer who experiences good quality service will be easily satisfied and thus be in a position to relate well with the service brand.

### 4.3.5 Mediation Role of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between brand experience dimensions and brand loyalty. This implies that positive brand experiences enhance satisfaction, which in turn fosters loyalty. The mediating role of satisfaction underscores its importance in the customer journey and loyalty formation process.

### 4.3.6 Strongest Predictors of Brand Loyalty

Among the brand experience dimensions, intellectuals and relational experiences emerged as the strongest predictors of brand loyalty. Intellectual experiences, reflecting the cognitive side of how a brand engages the mind of consumers, and relational experiences, encompassing meaningful interactions and relationships, significantly drive loyalty. This finding is consistent with the notion that cognitive and relational engagements are critical in building long-term customer relationships.

## 5. Study Implications and Conclusion

### 5.1 Study Implications

For QSR operators in Port Harcourt, the findings suggest the need to:

- a) Train staff to recognize regular customers and their preferences, introduce new and trending music, streamline ordering and dietary needs. All these will improve sensory experience.
- b) Enhance Emotional Engagement: Train staff to create emotionally positive experiences through friendly interactions and responsive service.
- c) Foster Cognitive Connections: Develop marketing strategies that resonate with customers' minds. Brands that are insightful and thought-provoking.
- d) Build Relational Bonds: Implement loyalty programs and community engagement initiatives to strengthen customer relationships.

### 5.2 Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on the impact of brand experience dimensions on guest satisfaction and brand loyalty in QSRs within Port Harcourt. Sensory, emotional, personal, and relational experiences are pivotal in driving satisfaction and loyalty. QSR operators should focus on these dimensions to enhance customer experiences and foster long-term loyalty. The study concludes that determining the effect of brand experience dimensions on customers' purchase behaviour by service brand managers is pivotal to evaluating customers' behavioural intentions towards service brands.

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