

## **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF AUTOMOBILE BRANDS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examined customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State. The study aimed at investigating the relationship between customer experience (sensory, affective and intellectual experience) and Customer Patronage (customer preference and repurchase intention) of automobile brands in Rivers State. The study adopted the positivist research philosophy and cross-sectional survey research design. The population of this study consisted of users of three automobile car brands namely; Toyota, Mercedes and Lexus in Rivers State. The exact number of users of these three automobile car brands in Rivers State is unknown, hence the Cochran's formula for determining the sample size of unknown population was applied. Using this formula, a sample size of 384 respondents was obtained. The 384 respondents were made up of users of Toyota, Mercedes and Lexus car brands in Rivers State. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents regarding their experience with the preferred car brands and how such experience relate to Customer Patronage of the brand. The data collected were analyzed statistically while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to test the hypotheses. The SPSS software program version 24.0 was used to aid the bivariate analysis. The findings revealed that sensory experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. The study also revealed that affective experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. The study equally reported that intellectual experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. Based on these findings, it was concluded that customer experience is a significant predictor of Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State. The study therefore recommended that automobile manufacturers especially those that are experiencing high rate of customer defection should offer quality automobile vehicles that will give customers a pleasant and memorable experience as this would increase Customer Patronage of their brand.*

***Keywords: Customer experience, sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience, Customer Patronage, customer preference, repurchase intention***

### **INTRODUCTION**

The automobile industry in Nigeria is experiencing significant growth in the past few years. This growth manifested in the increasing demand for automobile vehicles for easy and comfortable movement. The increasing demand for automobile vehicles has attracted many businessmen and women to the automobile industry, dealing on different cars brands, motor spare parts and engine oil (Maigida & Abutu, 2011). In Nigeria, the volume of investment in automobile industry is alarming as there is no city without an automobile car dealer or spare part trader (Abutu et al, 2017). The large number of automobile brands in the market has made the industry very competitive as every car dealer is strategizing to hold onto their customers and increase Customer Patronages of their brands. Obviously, increasing Customer Patronage of their car brand will bring about sales growth and profitability growth (Williams & Donald, 2007). When the sales and profit of a company grow on a steady basis, it will lead to business growth and expansion (Williams & Donald, 2007). For this reason, automobile car dealers are intensifying their efforts to keep the customers and continue to

enjoy Customer Patronages of their brands. Intensifying efforts to keep customers is not a bad idea but such efforts should be channeled towards providing customers with positive and memorable experience.

Customer experience is a set of interaction that happened between the customer and a product, which will evoke the emotion or provoke the action or reaction (Gentile et al, in Imbug et al, 2018). It is an individual interpretation of the service process and its interactions that influence his or her feelings. Sirapracha and Tocquer (2012) stated that customer experience originates from a set of interactions which a customer had with a product which trigger a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and arises from customer's direct involvement with the product or service. This compelling experience is a key determinant of Customer Patronage. A positive experience with a product will bring about brand loyalty while a negative experience will discourage the customer from re-patronizing the product or service. Every bottled water producer needs to ensure that their product gives customers a positive experience in order to provoke repeat patronage reaction and ensure brand loyalty. Providing a positive experience requires bottled water producers to make customer focus a top priority and manage customer experience effectively.

Customer experience differs from person to person because each person has a different experience that is evoked by a brand. Extending the experience to every touch point is highly necessary when a company enters the product development stage. All the touch points are key moments where the customers deeply and fully experience the dividend of the brand. For instance, when a coffeemaker makes a coffee for a customer, the customer sees the coffeemaker, touches its buttons, hears the sound it makes, enjoys the smell of fresh coffee and eventually tastes the coffee. All the sensory modalities contribute to the customer experience (Fenko et al, 2009). However, a company needs to refresh the experience when it is about to introduce a new product into its product mix (Motta-Filho, 2021). Every experience provided by a product or service has an emotional component and using a bottled water brand is no exception. Therefore, incorporating emotion into the process of developing a product is crucial in providing a great brand experience. A proper understanding of how customers feel and what affect these feelings is essential for a company that wants to provide a great customer experience.

Customer experience has a great influence on Customer Patronage of a brand. It is such experience that differentiate one brand from another in the minds of consumers. Ong et al (2018) stated that a positive experience makes a brand to occupy a distinct position in the mind of a consumer. This is why Wulandari (2015) reiterated that positive experience is a differentiation and competitive tool to win loyal customers. According to Lazuriaga and Barrera (2018), a positive experience deeper customer's connection with the brand, inspire and motivate them to make Customer Patronage of a brand. This is why companies need to go all out to create an impressive and consistent experience. Yulianti and Tung (2013) stated that companies need to create a consistent experience and use it as a foundation for establishing a flashy and exciting interactions with their customers. While a company can create experience that produce reactions along a generalized spectrum, individual customers will certainly have a different reaction to the company's efforts. A pleasant and memorable experience will surely motivate customers to make Customer Patronages of a brand. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State.

### **Statement of Problem**

Many automobile car dealers in Rivers State are struggling to increase Customer Patronage of their brand in the midst of fierce competition. Increasing Customer Patronage has become a dream for many automobile car dealers in Rivers State as their level of customer defection is very high despite

their marketing efforts to keep their customers and ensure their Customer Patronages. The rate of customer defection is very high in the automobile car market segment. As the rate of customer defection increases, the sales and profit margin of the affected firms decreases. A good number of automobile car dealers in Rivers State are experiencing customer defection which has negatively affected the sales and profit of their firm. It is argued in this study that dealing on car brands that will provide customers with positive experience can help to reduce customer defection and increase Customer Patronage of their brand. However, substantial empirical evidence that support this argument is lacking in academic literature especially within the Nigerian context as empirical studies that examined the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brand in Rivers State are limited. This has created a gap in marketing literature which the present study attempt to fill and make contribution to literature.

### Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands is shown in figure 1 below:

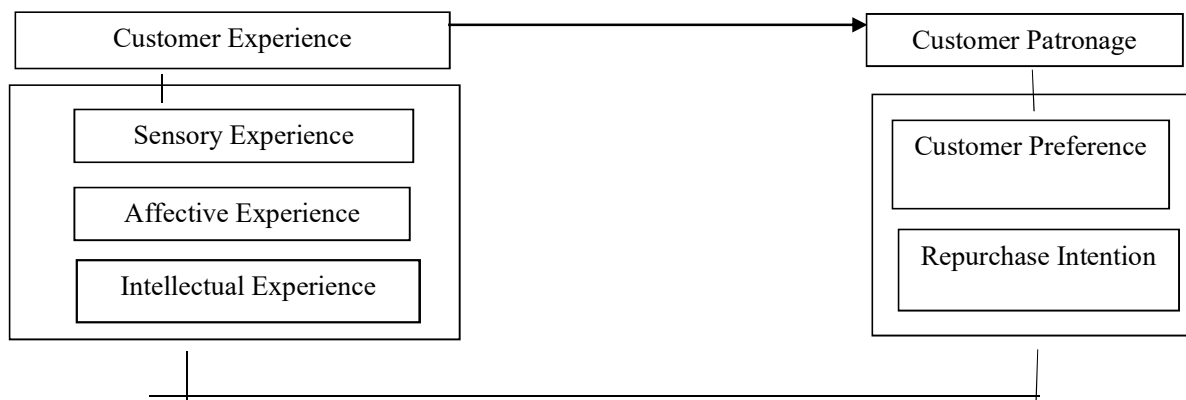


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State

### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the relationship between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
2. ascertain the relationship between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State.
3. explore the relationship between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
4. ascertain the relationship between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State.
5. determine the relationship between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
6. explore the relationship between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State.

### Research Questions

The following questions were answered in the course of the study:

1. To what extent does sensory experience influence customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does sensory experience relate to repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does affective experience influence customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State?
4. To what extent does affective experience relate to repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State?
5. To what extent does intellectual experience influence customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State?
6. To what extent does intellectual experience relate to Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are postulated to guide this study:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brands in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>5</sub>: There is no significant relationship between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brands in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>6</sub>: There is no significant relationship between intellectual experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Concept of Customer Experience**

Customer experience incorporates an emotional relationship concept, as well as cognitive and behavioural concepts (Wulandari, 2015). However, Sahin et al in Merdiaty and Aldrin (2022) argued that customer experience is not a concept of emotional connection rather emotion is just one internal result of stimulation that evokes the experience. Sundbo and Sorensen (2013) stated that customer experience is determined by external stimuli and elaborated via mental awareness. Customer experience needs an external trigger that activates the human senses and generate response (Schmitt, 2010). Customer experience creates actions that form an emotional relationship with a customer. It builds trust, increases customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sahin et al, 2022). Since brand experience differs, it therefore make sense to judge experience from the individual perspective based on how the brand meets their needs and expectations (Iglesiasa et al, 2018). Merdiaty and Aldrin (2022) argued that brand experience is not just limited to one single experience from a touch point rather it involves the experiences from different touch points in different stages of the pre-consumption journey, for instance, when a customer has the experience, alternative valuations and anticipated experiences in brand companies including perceived sensations and memories of post-consumption experiences. Customer experience can be positive or negative, short or long-term depending on the level of reflection in which it occurs (Luzuriaga & Barrera, 2018). A long-term experience is memorable, either positive or negative (Luzuriaga & Barrera, 2018). It increases familiarity and popularity with a brand and ensure Customer Patronages.

### **Dimensions of Customer Experience**

Customer experience is a multi-dimensional concept which revolves around four (4) dimensions namely; sensory experience, affective experience, behavioural experience and intellectual experience (Zarantenello et al, 2000; Ong et al, 2018; Brakus et al, 2009; Yulianti & Tung, 2013). However, this study focuses on sensory, affective and intellectual experience.

#### **Sensory Experience**

Sensory experience measures the level of impression created by a brand which affects the senses (Brakus et al, in Wulandari, 2015). Ong et al (2018) described sensory experience as a consumer's experience as derived from sensory interaction with the brand i.e. sight, emotion, touch, smell or listen. Sensory experience comprises all the stimuli (visual, touch, auditory, taste and smell) perceived by a human being which a brand can provoke (Luzuriaga & Barrera, 2018). It is the process of using sense of customers to measure their brand experience (Yulianti & Tung, 2013). Sensory brand experience manifest in form of visual, auditory, olfactory, taste and tactile senses (Oh et al, 2019). Schmitt in Beig and Nika (2019) stated that sensory experience involves five senses of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Human beings use their senses to pay a close attention to any permutation in their environment (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2022). For this reason, companies focus on the sensory aspects of human beings in order to capture their minds in favour of their products or brands. Sensory expressions help to identify and distinguish the design, style, colour and graphics of one brand from the other. Sense of hearing enables people to identify different sounds and these sounds give different meanings and inspirations which create memories (Luzuriaga & Barrera, 2018). Sense of smell allows people to perceive fragrance of a brand and compare one brand with another (Moreira et al, 2017). A brand's quality, design, shape and colour and taste positively influence customers' sensory experience (Hulten, 2011).

#### **Affective Experience**

Affective experience relates with sentiments, feelings and emotions that brands induce in customer (Iglesiasa et al, 2018). Sentiments are attitudes, thoughts and judgments held by an individual towards something. Such attitudes, thoughts or judgment are instigated by the feeling of the individual toward that thing (Shami & Butt, 2013). Feelings refer to a bodily consciousness of a physiological sensation. It is the perception of the physiological events or experience within the body (Alloza, 2008). Emotions represents the internal or external state of reality and the bodily changes that accompany them. It contains a subjective element and a third person observable element (Hoch, 2002). A person feels emotions through his or her emotional experience. Ishida and Taylor (2012) stated that emotions manifest in an unconscious mind and it is associated with beliefs, thoughts, desires and actions. The way a person sees other people expressing their emotions determines how he or she will respond. Uecharoenkit and Cohen (2011) posited that emotion describes a person state of mind such as happiness, anger, love, hatred, fear or bold. It can be caused by the situation a person find himself or herself. Schmitt in Luzuriaga and Barrera (2018) stated that companies need to understand the stimuli that can trigger the emotions and disposition of customers so that they can address them.

#### **Intellectual Experience**

Intellectual experience is the imaginative and analytical thinking that brands trigger in customers (Iglesiasa et al, 2018). Ong et al (2018) defined intellectual experience as a consumer's experience derived from intellectual interaction with the brand i.e. positive thinking or curiosity. Thinking skills enable a person to find interesting ways to approach task and solve complex problems. Kalyar (2011) stated that a person can be said to have a thinking skills if he or she looks at things from a unique perspective. West and Farr (1990) posited that a person can explore creative thinking by gathering materials, intensely working over the materials in his or her mind, stepping away from

the problem, allowing the idea to come back naturally, and testing the idea in real world and adjusting it when necessary. Pirola-Merlo and Mann (2004) opined that a person can improve his or her thinking by dreaming, his own ideas, creating his own ideas, making out time for cohesive thinking, learning to pitch ideas and bounce ideas, and bouncing ideas off others. Curiosity also shows a person behaviour and emotional desire to know about everything that he or she is interested in. As a behaviour and emotion, curiosity is seen as the driving force behind human and societal development (Zuss, 2012).

### **Concept of Customer Patronage**

Customer Patronage is the willingness of an individual to re-patronize a product, service or organization (Wirtz & Lwin, 2009). It involves placing of order after order by a consumer from the same organization (Jayasuriya et al, 2020). Customer Patronage can also be described as the buying of the same product or service to replace the used one (Zhang et al, 2021). Hellier et al (2003) stated that customers who engage in Customer Patronage are customers who are satisfied emotionally, intellectually, physically by an organization offering which could be in form of a product or service exceeding their expectations. If a customer purchases a company's brand (product) and he is happy with it, he may likely purchase the same brand when the time comes to replace the previous purchase that has been used or consumed (Hellier et al, 2003). In a relationship built on trust, commitment is engendered and then becomes a major predictor of future purchases. Customers regularly visit a particular firm based on their perception of trust-that is, they believe that the company has their best interest at heart when providing a product or service (Caudill & Murphy 2000). Customer Patronage is a good indicator of a long term business sustainability and profitability of an organization; this is because it points to customer satisfaction and retention. (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). Higher Customer Patronage means higher profitability as it does not include new customer acquisition costs; organization can take some actions to ensure Customer Patronage of either their products or services by listening to customer comments, suggestion, feedback, complaints about the product or services they are offering, by also providing value adding services to the customer experience (Jayasuriya et al, 2020). Customer Patronage is the prime goal a company can set for its products since it is consumer reference to purchase a given brand in a product category (Nismi, 2017).

### **Measures of Customer Patronage**

Customer Patronage can be measured using various criteria. However, for the purpose of this study, Customer Patronage is measured using customer preference and repurchase intention.

### **Customer Preference**

Brand preference is the subjective taste of an individual consumer as measured by his or her satisfaction with the brand purchased (Baek & Kim, 2010). This satisfaction is often referred to as utility. Consumer value can be determined by how consumer utility compares between different items. Tolba (2021) stated that consumers prefer a product based on the satisfaction that it gives them. According to him, when a customer tries a product for the very first time and the product delivers the expected benefits or exceed the customer's expectation, the customer will prefer the product to other competing brands in the market. Palmer in Agyekum et al (2015) noted that consumers purchase a product on the basis of satisfying their recognized needs. The choice of product to satisfy particular need depends on the perception of the consumer about the product quality. A good deal of research has assumed that, other things being equal (e.g., costs, shelf space), offering more options is better. The fact that consumers like variety in certain product categories, a reduction in assortment has been shown to lead to reduced sales (Borle et al. 2005). At the same time, offering greater product variety is usually associated with higher costs (Draganska & Jain 2005); a firm's production costs often increase with the length of their product line.

### Repurchase Intention

According to Hellier et al (2003), repurchase intention is the consumers' judgment to buy a selected product again from the same company by taking his or her current situation into consideration. Zhang et al (2021) defined repurchase intention as when a particular customer purchases a product again from the seller or company based on his or her previous experience and satisfaction. Dodds et al in Nismi (2017) stated that repurchase intention is a subjective judgment by the consumers that is revealed after overall evaluation to buy products or services. Jayasuriya et al (2020) argued that customers who have repurchasing intention are vital clients for business because they are the ones that keep the business running. This group of customers are the most profitable for a company and this is why the company needs to make adequate efforts to hold onto them. For customers to repurchase a product or service, there must be an intention to do so. Without developing a repurchase intention, customers cannot exhibit the action or behavior of Customer Patronage (Nismi, 2017). Jayasuriya et al (2020) stated that companies need to figure out what is running inside their customers' heads regarding whether they have the intention to repurchase their brand. This is the most challenging thing to do because the minds of customers differ and more difficult to understand (Jayasuriya et al, 2020).

### Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the IDIC approach which was developed in 1991 by Pepper and Rogers. This theory argues that companies must take four actions to provide a pleasant experience to customers throughout their lifecycle (Pepper & Roger, 1991). These four actions according to Pepper and Rogar include **I**dentify, **D**ifferentiate, **I**nteract and **C**ustomize which is summarized as IDIC approach. According to Pepper and Rogar (1991), companies must first of all *identify* their target customers and have a deeper knowledge about them in order to serve them better than competitors do. After identifying the target customers, the company can then *differentiate* and categorize the customers according to their needs and value. Once the customers have been differentiated according to their needs and value, the company should constantly *interact* with the customers to understand their needs and expectations as well as their relationship with the brand. Having interacted with them regularly, the company should customize its product line with individual customer needs and values. Customization enables a company to build a long-term relationship with their customers.

The IDIC theory is most appropriate for studies where the researchers wants to determine the brand experience of customers (Imbug et al, 2018). The theory is very useful in explaining customer experience with a brand and such experience influence their Customer Patronage of the brand. The theory requires companies to offer products that will give customers a pleasant and memorable experience. The theory suggests that companies can provide a pleasant and memorable experience to their customers if they identify their target customers, differentiate them according to their needs and values, interact with them constantly to understand their actual needs, and customize their offerings. Obviously, identify, differentiate, interact and customize are the secret for providing pleasant and memorable experience and increasing Customer Patronages. The theory explains that most of the companies that enjoy high degree of Customer Patronages from their customers are those that apply the principles of IDIC in providing products and services that give customers a memorable experience.

### Empirical Review

A good number of studies have been conducted on customer experience and Customer Patronage of brand. For example, Sahin et al (2011) carried out a study to determine the effects of brand experience, trust and satisfaction on building brand loyalty. Their study focused on global brands in Turkey. The researchers adopted the survey research design where a structured questionnaire was

used to elicit data from 258 consumers who reside in the metropolitan area of Istanbul. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency tables, means, standard deviation and factor analysis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis were used to test their hypotheses. The findings showed that brand experience has significant relationship with brand loyalty. The study also found a significant relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. The study also revealed that customer satisfaction has significant effect on brand loyalty. The study concluded that brand experience, trust and customer satisfaction have significant effect on brand loyalty.

Mohammad (2017) empirically examined the impact of brand experiences, brand equity and corporate branding on brand loyalty. The researcher used sensory experience, affective experience and cognitive experience as his dimensions of brand experience and relate them to brand loyalty. The study employed a qualitative research approach and the descriptive survey research design. Data were collected from 413 employees in 10 companies in the fashion industry in Amman, the capital city of Jordan and Irbid. The instrument used by the researcher in collecting data from the respondents was a structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed statistically using confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that affective experience has a significant effect on brand loyalty but sensory and cognitive experiences have no significant effect on brand loyalty.

Choi et al (2020) evaluated relationships among brand experience, brand personality, brand prestige, brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. Their study focused on Coffeehouse brands. The researchers adopted the online survey and qualitative research approach where a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 309 coffeehouse customers in the United States. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency tables, mean and standard deviation while their hypotheses were tested using confirmatory factor analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and regression analysis. The findings revealed that brand experience and brand personality have direct positive effect on brand prestige. The study also revealed that brand experience has a direct effect on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. The study revealed that brand relationship quality directly and indirectly influence attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

Joshi (2014) examined customer experience management in the telecom industry. His study focused on the parameters (brand, environment, culture, communications and offerings) affecting customer experience for cellular mobile services of a telecom company. The researcher adopted the exploratory survey research design and used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 536 mobile customers in the city of Pune, Maharashtra. The data collected were analyzed statistically using factor analysis while the outcome of the factor analysis was used to test the formulated hypotheses. After running the factor analysis on the study variables, the researchers found out quality service delivery, customer care services, brand, communication and internal environment affect customer experience.

Siraprasit and Tocquer (2012) carried out a study on branding and customer experience in the wireless telecommunication industry in Thailand. Their study employed both the qualitative and quantitative research approach. The researcher used an interview schedule to collect data from 240 students in four (4) universities in Thailand. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed statistically while the hypotheses were tested using the Bivariate Correlation. The findings revealed that wireless telecommunication companies delivers different customer experiences and have different image. The study also discovered that positive relationship exists between customer experience and customer loyalty. The study equally revealed that customer experiences influence the strength of a brand include its image and customer loyalty.

Ertemel et al (2021) examined the role of customer experience in increasing customer loyalty in online flow state. The researchers adopted the survey research design and the quantitative research approach where a structured questionnaire to obtain data from 538 consumers who regularly use the internet in India. The data collected were analyzed using structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis. The findings showed that online flow state helps online e-commerce websites build customer satisfaction and customer loyalty indirectly through customer experience.

### **Gap in Literature**

From the studies reviewed, it was observed that a significant number of studies have been conducted on customer experience but most of the studies relate customer experience to brand loyalty while studies that examined the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronages are absent or scanty. Even the dimensions of customer experience (sensory, affective and intellectual experience) were not related to Customer Patronage (customer preference and repurchase intention). Secondly, it was observed that most of the studies conducted on customer experience were carried out in the telecommunication sector while empirical studies that examined the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronage of soft drink industry in Rivers State are lacking. Considering the gaps created in literature, this study makes an effort to fill the gaps in academic literature by exploring the relationship between customer experience and Customer Patronages of soft drink brands in Rivers State.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed the positivist research philosophy and cross-sectional survey research design. The population of this study consisted of users of three automobile car brands namely; Toyota, Mercedes and Lexus in Rivers State. The exact number of users of these three automobile car brands in Rivers State is unknown, hence the Cochran's formula for determining the sample size of unknown population was applied. Using this formula, a sample size of 384 respondents was obtained and used for the study. The 384 respondents were made up of users of Toyota, Mercedes and Lexus car brands in Rivers State. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents regarding their experience in using their preferred car brands and the possibility of making Customer Patronage of the same car brand in future. The questionnaire was structured on a four (4) point rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was validated through face and content analysis while the Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A total copy of 384 questionnaires was administered to the respondents (Toyota, Mercedes and Lexus car users) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Out of the 384 questionnaire administered to the respondents, 326 copies were retrieved from them. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ). The SPSS software program version 24.0 was used to aid the bivariate analysis.

### **Empirical Results and Discussion**

In this section, the results of the bivariate analysis carried out between customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brand were presented. The data collected on sensory, affective and intellectual experience were correlated with those data obtained on customer preference and repurchase intention using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ). This analysis was aided with the SPSS 24.0 version. The results of the analysis are presented in the tables below:

**Table 1: Result of bivariate analysis between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brand**

			Sensory Experience	Customer Preference
Pearson (r)	Sensory Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.691**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326
	Customer Preference	Correlation Coefficient	.691**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	326	326

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

*Source: SPSS-generated Output*

Table 1 shows the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result indicates that sensory experience has a strong and positive correlation with customer preference of automobile brand ( $\rho = .691^{**}$ ) and the symbol \*\* signifies that this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is strong positive and significant relationship between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State.

**Table 2: Result of bivariate analysis between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand**

			Sensory Experience	Repurchase Intention
Pearson (r)	Sensory Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.522**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326
	Repurchase Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.522**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	326	326

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

*Source: SPSS-generated Output*

Table 2 contains the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result shows a moderate and positive correlation between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $r = .522^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol \*\*. Consequently, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is a moderate positive and significant relationship between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand.

**Table 3: Result of bivariate analysis between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brand**

			Affective Experience	Customer Preference
Pearson (r)	Affective Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.809**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326

Customer Preference	Correlation Coefficient	.809**	1.000
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
	N	326	326

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS-generated Output

Table 3 presents the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result shows that affective experience has a very strong and positive correlation with customer preference of automobile brand ( $r = .809^{**}$ ) and the symbol  $**$  indicate that this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. As a result of this, we then reject the null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a very strong positive and significant relationship between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State

**Table 4: Result of bivariate analysis between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand**

			Affective Experience	Repurchase Intention
Pearson (r)	Affective Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.663**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326
	Repurchase Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.663**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	326	326

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 4 presents the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result indicates that affective experience has a strong positive correlation with repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $\rho = .663^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol  $**$ . Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is strong positive and significant relationship between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State.

**Table 5: Result of bivariate analysis between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brand**

			Intellectual Experience	Customer Preference
Pearson (r)	Affective Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.719**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326
	Customer Preference	Correlation Coefficient	.719**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	326	326

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS-generated Output

Table 5 shows the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result indicates that intellectual experience is strongly and positively correlated to customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State ( $r = .719^{**}$ ) and the symbol  $^{**}$  indicates that this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{05}$ ) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is strong positive and significant relationship between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State.

**Table 6: Result of bivariate analysis between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand**

			Intellectual Experience	Repurchase Intention
Pearson (r)	Intellectual Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.582 $^{**}$
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	326	326
	Repurchase Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.582 $^{**}$	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	326	326

$^{**}$ Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

*Source: SPSS-generated Output*

Table 6 presents the result of the bivariate analysis carried out between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. The result shows a moderate positive correlation between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $r = .582^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol  $^{**}$ . Based on this result, we then reject the null hypothesis ( $H_{06}$ ) and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is moderate positive and significant relationship between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State.

### Discussion of Findings

This study discovered a strong positive and significant relationship between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding was obtained from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables. The result revealed that sensory experience has a strong and positive correlation with customer preference of automobile brand ( $\rho = .691^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 1). Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that we then accepted that there is significant relationship between sensory experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Beig and Nika (2019) which reported that consumer preference for a brand is strongly influenced by their sensory experience. Moreira et al (2017) also agreed with this finding when they revealed that customer experience significantly influence customer preference for a brand.

This study found a moderate positive and significant relationship between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding was derived from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on two variables. The result showed a moderate and positive correlation between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $r = .522^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 2). Consequently, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that we then accepted that

there is a moderate positive and significant relationship between sensory experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand. This finding is supported by Hulten (2011) who noted that sensory experience significantly motivate customers to develop repurchase intention for a product or brand. Wulandari (2015) stated that consumers usually develop repurchase intention based on their sensory experience regarding the product after use.

This study reported a strong positive and significant relationship between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding was deduced from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables. The result revealed that affective experience has a very strong and positive correlation with customer preference of automobile brand ( $r = .809^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 3). As a result of this, we then rejected the null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) and accepted the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a very strong positive and significant relationship between affective experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Uecharoenkit and Cohen (2011) who noted that consumer preference for a product or service is strongly influenced by their affective experience. Iglesiasa et al (2018) also agreed with this finding when stated that affective experience has a great influence on consumer choice of product or service. A strong positive and significant relationship was reported between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding emerged from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables. The result revealed that affective experience has a strong positive correlation with repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $\rho = .663^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 4). Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is strong positive and significant relationship between affective experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Ishida and Taylor (2012) which reported that customers often develop repurchase intention based on their affective experience with a brand. Shami and Butt (2013) also supported this finding when they noted that customers' affective experience has a strong influence on their repurchase intention.

This study also found a strong positive and significant relationship between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding emerged from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables. The result revealed that intellectual experience is strongly and positively correlated to customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State ( $r = .719^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 5). Based on this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{05}$ ) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that we then accepted that there is strong positive and significant relationship between intellectual experience and customer preference of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Alloza (2008) which confirmed that consumers' intellectual experience influence their brand preference. Luzuriaga and Barrera (2018) also agreed with this finding when they reported that customer preference for brand is significantly influenced by the intellectual experience with the product.

Finally, it was revealed that intellectual experience has a significant relationship with repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding emanated from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables. The result showed a moderate positive correlation between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand ( $r = .582^{**}$ ) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level (see table 6). Based on this result, we then rejected the null hypothesis ( $H_{06}$ ) and accepted the alternate hypothesis which states that there is moderate positive and significant relationship between intellectual experience and repurchase intention of automobile brand in Rivers State. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Ong et al (2018)

and Zuss (2012) as both studies revealed that customer experience significantly trigger repurchase intention.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined customer experience and Customer Patronage of automobile brand in Rivers State. It focused on the sensory, affective and intellectual experience of customers with their automobile brand and how such experience relate to Customer Patronage (customer preference and repurchase intention) of the brand. From the result of the analysis carried out, it was discovered that sensory experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. The study also revealed that affective experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. The study equally reported that intellectual experience has a significant relationship with customer preference and repurchase intention of automobile brands. Based on these findings, it was concluded that customer experience is a significant predictor of Customer Patronage of automobile brands in Rivers State.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided for the study:

1. That, automobile manufacturers should regularly interact with their customers to determine their experience with their brand as this would enable them develop vehicles that will improve their sensory, affective and intellectual experience.
2. That, automobile manufacturers especially those that are experiencing high rate of customer defection should offer quality automobile vehicles that will give customers a pleasant and memorable experience as this would increase Customer Patronage of their brand.
3. That, automobile manufacturers particularly those whose customers have switched to other competing brands should innovate their brand as this would give customers a sensory experience and repeatedly purchase their brand.
4. That, automobile manufacturers should continuously improve the quality of their products to meet the changing taste and preference of customers as this would give customers an affective experience that will motivate them to make Customer Patronage and become strong advocates of their brand.
5. That, automobile manufacturers especially those whose products have gained a bad reputation over the years should rebrand their products by redesigning and repositioning them as this would not only change customers' perception towards the brand but also give customers an intellectual experience that will increase their Customer Patronage of their brand.
6. Finally, it is recommended that automobile manufacturers should gather customers' complaints and use these complaints to improve the quality of their products as this would give customers a sensory, affective and intellectual experience that will increase Customer Patronage of their brand.

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