

Experiential Marketing and Customer Engagement of Noodles Producing Firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study empirically investigated the relationship between experiential marketing and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. The population for the study was customers of seven (7) noodles producing companies in Port Harcourt. A total of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to test the predictor and criterion variables respectively. The results indicated a significant positive and strong relationship between experiential marketing and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. The findings suggested that experiential marketing was a firm-level strategic resource that can improve the customer engagement of noodles producing firms in the food and beverages sector. From the findings in the study, we concluded that the dimensions of experiential marketing significantly relate to the measures of customer engagement. We therefore, recommend that, Firms should interact with their customers on consistent basis and involve them in some of their decision making.

Keywords: Experiential Marketing, Sensory Experience, Emotional Experience, Customer Engagement.

1.1.INTRODUCTION

In today's speedily evolving marketplace, lots of marketing strategies have moved from traditional brick and mortar into focusing more on promoting products and services that more dynamic on customer experience. One such approach is known as experiential marketing, which looks at creating memorable and impactful experiences for customers in the course of their transactions. The noodles market in Nigeria is one of the fastest-growing segments of the nation's Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector. The Nigerian noodles market provides an interesting context that helps in carrying out a study on experiential marketing and customer engagement due to its high demand and competitive nature as well as its dominance of key players in the market, such as Indomie, Golden Penny Noodles, and Dangote Noodles. In other words, firms are gradually applying experiential marketing as a strategy in order to differentiate their brands and compete favorably by creating memorable experiences that creates memorable customer engagement. For instance, a firm producing noodles may decide to use social media platforms to engage consumers by hosting their recipe competition, offering cooking tips, and further encouraging user-generated content. These social media activities increase brand visibility and create a sense of community amongst consumers, thereby deepening their emotional connection to the firm's products or services. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) argue that when such engagements take place, it leads to increased affective, cognitive and behavioral engagements, as consumers who emotionally connected to the firm's brand are more likely to remain loyal and refer the firm to others. Experience is the key concept that helps a firm in understanding consumer pre-purchase behavior and post-purchase behavior. Experience refers to the ability for a person to have an emotional significance developed by having contact with the firm's product or brand related stimuli (Österle et al., 2018). Experiential marketing is a concept where consumers connect and participates by having a memorable experience with the firm's products or services (Adweek, 2019).

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This gap presents the basis for empirical research to be done, in order to identify the key success factors and challenges that are associated with implementing experiential marketing strategies in the noodles producing firms' contexts. By conducting a comprehensive analysis, this study seeks to evaluate how experience-based marketing can drive customer engagement in an increasingly competitive and experience-driven marketplace.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The competition in the Nigerian noodles market is not exceptional with the fierce competition in the marketplace, and firms doing all they can to capture a good market share and consumer loyalty in an environment where product differentiation is minimal. Due to the nature of competition in this sector, Noodles-producing firms rely heavily on price promotions, massive advertising and distribution strategies in order to gain a competitive edge.

One major challenge is the diversity of the consumer base, and this makes it difficult to create experiences that impact with the different segments of the population. Nigeria, which is multi-cultural in nature, has diverse languages, traditions, and preferences, which can frustrate the design and execution of experiential marketing campaigns (Nwaorgu, 2020).

Another challenge facing the Nigerian market is the infrastructure that is needed to support large-scale experiential marketing events, which in Port Harcourt, that is still a major challenge. In view of these challenges stated above, it further verify evidence of the above related studies, this present study wants to find out whether experiential marketing strategies can lead to affective engagement and cognitive engagement. Again, it is necessary to investigate whether the implementation of sensory and emotional experience could result to and improve affective engagement and cognitive engagement as it affects noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Hence, the aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between experiential marketing and customer engagements of Noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

2.1. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1.1. Concept of Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing refers to a strategic process that firms seek to engage or involve consumers into a brand by creating engaging, sensory, and emotional experiences for consumers. Unlike traditional marketing, which places interest more on the functional attributes of a product or service, experiential marketing concentrates on creating a personal and memorable interaction between a firm and its customers. Schmitt (1999), divided experiential marketing into five types of experiences such as: sensory (sense), emotional (feel), cognitive (think), behavioral (act), and social (relate). The reason for these experiences is mainly to trigger positive emotions and create a lasting connection between the consumer and the brand. The introduction of experiential marketing can be traced back to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) concept of the "experience economy," which they are of the opinion that firms should reframe from just providing products and services to consumers, but offer experiences that engage consumers on a deeper and emotional level. Experiential marketing is an avenue used in providing information that is more than just information about a product or service to a consumer. Experiential Marketing is a marketing approach that involves the emotions and feelings of consumers by creating an unforgettable positive experience for the consumers in the course of transacting with the firm. (Muljani, 2021). Experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that is used by firms to create loyal customers by triggering their emotions and giving them a positive feeling to the firm's products or services. Experiential marketing focuses more the on experiences customer get from using a firm's products or services. Experience is said to have occurred as a result of having access, handling the products, utilizing the product or service, and remembering the outcome that came out of the experiential object. In Nigeria, experiential marketing has become so vital to firms that they to cut through the media clutter, and it is therefore suggested, it should be an aspect of integrated marketing communications program using advertising, public relations, digital and sponsorship marketing (Akanmu, 2013). Vrtana & Krizanova (2025), looked at the role emotions plays in the experiences of consumer during and after purchase, they highlighted that when consumers respond emotionally and positively during their purchases, it is likely to increase engagement and loyalty.

Hamacher et al., (2022) also support this view, by stating that experiences that gets triggered through these five senses, creates lasting impressions in the consumers and it bring about stronger relationships with customers.

2.1.2. Sensory Experience

Sensory is all about creating positive consumer experiences through senses like: hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell. Sensory elements are expected to add value to a firm's product and further motivate customers to purchase. Schmitt (1999) argues that the sense marketing can be a strategy used to stimulate the senses with the aim of creating positive sensory experiences, through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Sensory marketing is also an avenue used to differentiate a firm and its products, in order to motivate customers to make a purchase and add value to products via aesthetics or excitement. Consumers use sensory experience to develop logic and judgment in order to form his or her value decisions

that is attached to the goods and services offered by the firm. These attached judgments comprise of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, relational, and symbolic values. In other words, the logic experience enables consumers to combine emotional and rational elements within their brains to assist them in taking a decision of sensory experience towards a firm and its products or services.

2.1.3. Emotional Experience

The emotional aspect of experiential marketing is made up of strategies that bring about experiences for consumers that operate with emotions in the course of using the firm's products or services. The feelings or affective dimension in experiential marketing is generated when a consumer's experience brings about exciting emotions of satisfaction that generates an emotional connected with the customer. Consumer feelings are most powerful when they occur during consumption. And these strong feelings happen as a result from the contacts and interactions; the consumers have developed for the firm's products over time. Accompanied by positive feelings in the consumption situation, consumers embrace positive emotions when they are using a firm's product they like so much (Schmitt, 1999). Most customers involve their emotions and feelings when making a purchase or when consuming a product. Mattila (2001) notes that "emotional feelings connect customers more to invest in their relationships than customers lacking affective commitment". The feeling experience of a customer looks more on creating a memorable experience and can touch consumer's deepest feelings and emotions; this can be created through quality features, products and good customer service (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013).

2.2. Customer Engagement

The term "customer engagement" can be seen to mean a lot of things from customer satisfaction, loyalty or repeat purchase. Customer engagement refers to the depth of the relationship that connects a firm and its consumers, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements. As defined by Brodie et al. (2011), customer engagement is a process where consumers interact with the firm, co-create values with them, and contribute to the firm's success through their emotional and psychological input in the firm's brand.

Customer engagement is a key driver of long-term customer loyalty and brand advocacy, as customers that are involved and participatory are more likely to make repeat purchases, refer the firm to others, and actively be engaged in the firm's-related activities. This engagement can be sharing the firm's content on social media, participating in firm's community post, or giving feedbacks that helps to improve the firm's future products and services. Customer engagement is very crucial in the FMCG sector, where consumers often have various options and low switching costs. In Nigeria's noodles market, firms are expected to look into creating meaningful engagement with customers that brings about loyalty in a fierce competitive marketplace. Engagement strategies may be in terms of loyalty programs, interactive social media campaigns, and experiential marketing events that add value to the customer beyond the product itself they purchase.

2.2.1. Experiential Marketing and Customer Engagement

Snakers & Zajdman (2010) define experiential marketing as a new marketing strategy where customers are made to have an experience of the product through the creation of emotions. Thus, the purpose of experiential marketing is to create emotions in the customers that lead to enjoying an unforgettable experience. You-Ming (2010) suggests that experiential marketing is a kind of direct marketing communication method, where customers physical and emotional feelings are triggered which allows them to interact and participate during and after the purchase of the firm's products and feel the experience wholeheartedly. Experiential marketing focuses mainly on consumer emotions, feelings, and senses and that it has very little to do with cognitions and human intentions.

Cantone & Risitano (2011) confirmed that firms are gradually adopting customer experience management strategies which looks at the role emotions, feelings, sentiments, passions and experiences play in the consumer-firm relationships ". According to Yuan & Wu (2008) experiential marketing can be seen as a marketing tactic that is developed by a firm to build the entire physical ambience and the operational system for its customers to experience. Hekkert (2006) distinguishes three levels of experience such as: attribution of meaning (experience of meaning), emotional response (emotional experience), and aesthetic pleasure (aesthetic experience). This level of experiences influences customer value co-creation, purchase decisions and behavior. Therefore, companies like Noodles producing firms should endeavor to develop unforgettable experiences that appeals to consumers, because other firms are heavily engaging in experiential marketing.

2.2.2. Sensory Experience and Customer Engagement

The sound is a kind of auditory effect given out by an actual cause. The effect of sound symbolism produced as sound by objects cannot be over-looked because, when a person reads a word, that person hears that word as well. Yorkston and Menon (2004) and Klink (2000) opined that the brand name of frosh brand ice cream sounds creamier than fresh brand ice cream. That is to say, a brand name should sound coincide with what consumers expects the product to be. Therefore, noodles producing firms should endeavor to use names that appeals to the ear.

Music also enhances the mood and reactions of consumers that buy online. Infact, it influences consumer's online buying habit – the sound of the voice coming out from the website when navigating the site has a lot to do in the consumer's purchase decision etc. Linking music with a firm's message helps the consumer to remember the adverts. That is to say, as soon as some consumers hear the music, they already know whose firm's advert it is. Sound has great impact on consumer behavior. The sound is a perception of sensory experience which influences consumer's mood and sways their purchasing habit. While fast tempo music was seen to push customers away earlier than planned and slow music played at low volume tends to increase the time and the money a consumer spends in a given firm (Milliman, 1986). Taste which is gotten from using the tongue can be sweet, bitter, sour, salty or savory and the sense organ for taste is the tongue, as little as that organ is, it plays a powerful role in consumer behavior. The name of a brand also affects its perceived taste. In the noodles producing firms, the taste of the noodles plays a major role in determining customer retention. Hence, we hypothesized:

H01: There is no significant relationship between sensory experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

2.2.3. Emotional Experience and Customer Engagement

Emotion could be seen as mental states of readiness that is as a result of cognitive appraisals of happenings or thoughts (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Understanding the emotional response to an experience can help firms to locate the vital aspects of the satisfying consumer's judgment (Mano & Oliver, 1993; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) which has the tendency of improving customer loyalty and repurchase behavior (Han & Back, 2007). Westbrook and Oliver (1991) carried out a study on the patterns of emotional response of consumers to product experiences by the linkage between consumer emotions and satisfaction judgment.

Mano and Oliver (1993) studies on post consumption experiences - evaluation, evoked affect and satisfaction. The role that emotions play has been well recorded in the context of advertising (Young, 2004), the use of products and services (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan, 2007; Chaudhuri, 2002) and in various aspects of the consumption experience from consumers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). A movie without a good ending linked with a newly purchased product having very high sophisticated features which are beyond the consumer's understanding of are the examples of such emotional purchase encounters. Self-report, Autonomic measures and brain imaging are the dimensions that were adopted in measuring emotions. Hence, we hypothesized:

H02: There is no significant relationship between emotional experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. Strategic Experiential Modules Theory

Schmitt (1999) looked at the aspects of marketing that focuses on creating experiences for customers and it promises to offer “nuggets for this new move”.

Schmitt (1999) differentiated five types of experiences that firms can create for their customers in order to give an unforgettable experience. These experiences are called strategic experiential modules (SEMs), and they are implemented through what is called experience providers (Ex-Pros). Experience providers include the following: communications, visual and verbal identity, product presence, electronic media, etc. Schmitt (1999a), further stated that the framework of experiential marketing is divided into two aspects: SEMs, which form the strategy underpins experiential marketing, and Ex-Pros, which are the tactical tools of experiential marketing. Hauser (2011) says that the term ‘experiential marketing’ refers to actual experience that customers has with a firm, it's, product or service that increases sales and improves corporate image and awareness.

2.4. Empirical Review

Experiential marketing is making beneficial impact on a firm's marketing mix. Experiential marketing is been applied in different businesses or industries such as hospitality and tourism, retail, health care, airline, automotive, real estate, banking, FMCG and others, in today's competitive marketplace, because it motivates customers to make faster and more positive purchasing decisions. Batat (2019) carried a study on experiential marketing in luxury brands, using qualitative interviews with luxury consumers. The results showed that luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Chanel engage in experiential marketing to enhance a sense of exclusivity and belonging.

Ozuru and Akahome (2016), investigated how Nigerian Breweries uses its range of products to influence customer purchase decision by examining the benefit of customer engagement and helps to understand the role of emotional benefit on marketing performance of beverages in the Nigerian Breweries plc. Experiential marketing play an vital role in the industrial sector of a country, but are faced with so many challenges that frustrates its development and growth. How can a marketer generate interesting ideas that would help to pull sales for the brand? And how much cost should be incurred

to project a huge life time customer experience in other to generate sales for a brand over a short time. This has led to inconsistencies in the continuation of events or shows by the company.

Girard (2025), examined a study on the effect of experiential marketing on customer engagement and loyalty in the tourism sector in France. This study used a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is mainly used in collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to field research. This study used already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

The study of Girard (2025), revealed that experiential marketing in France's tourism sector significantly boosts customer engagement and loyalty by offering personalized, memorable experiences. Overall, experiential marketing helps firm to shape customer perception and improve lasting relationships in French tourism.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey research design through cross-sectional survey design. The population of this study is the customers of seven (7) registered noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt (nigeriandirectory.org/noodles_firms/portharcourt).

Table 3.1: List of Noodles Producing Firms

S/No	Noodles Producing Firms	Address
1	Dufil Prima Food Limited	Uniport Road, Owhipa, Choba, Port Harcourt
2	BUA Food	Industrial complex, Port Harcourt
3	Tommy-Tommy Noodles	12 Bori close, Obia, Port Harcourt
4	IRS-2 Paste Plant	Q286-G4, Port Harcourt
5	Golden Penny	Trans-Amadi, Port Harcourt
6	Tummy-Tummy Instant Noodles	56 National St., Woji, Port Harcourt
7	Primera Food Company	Port Harcourt

Source: nigeriandirectory.org/noodles_firms/portharcourt, (2025).

This study lacked sufficient and working customers' database of these aforementioned noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt which could have served as the target population. Due to this limitation, the population of Port Harcourt was used as our target population from which the sample size was derived. The city has an estimated population of 1,947,000 as at March, 2025 (www.takemetonaija.com). Port Harcourt is divided into five (5) areas; Diobu, Borokiri, New GRA, Old GRA and Port Harcourt City.

Each of these areas has her population as shown in the table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Areas in Port Harcourt and its population

Area	Population
Diobu	421,389
Borokiri	411,275
New G.R.A.	215,208
Old G.R.A.	384,600
Port Harcourt City	514,528
Total	1,947,000

Source: Researchers Desk, 2025 (adopted from www.takemetonaija.com)

The study adopted Taro Yamen formula for sampling size determination in determining the sample size for this study, which a total number of 400 respondents through Taro Yamen's formula at a (0.05) level of significance.

Hence, simple random sampling was used to administer 400 copies of questionnaire to customers of the noodles producing firms fully operating in Port Harcourt who served as the respondents.

Table 3.3: Areas in Port Harcourt and its population

Area	Population	Respondents
Diobu	421,389	87
Borokiri	411,275	84
New G.R.A.	215,208	44
Old G.R.A.	384,600	79

Area	Population	Respondents
Port Harcourt City	514,528	106
Total	1,947,000	400

Source: Researchers Desk, 2025 (adopted from www.takemetonaija.com)

Therefore, the sample size (n) is 400 customers and the questionnaire were administered accordingly as they are sampled in the table below. However, all elements that constituted the sample size (400) are customers of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. Because of this, the study adopted the Cluster sampling technique. The data collected for the study were sorted, edited, coded and entered into statistical software Statistical Package for Social Sciences, (SPSS version 23). This involves converting quantitative (nominal and ordinal data) into numerical codes. The data collected were analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation to establish the relationship between both variables in order to establish the inferential significance of the relationship of dimensions of experiential marketing and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. Spearman Rank correlation analysis was also conducted at 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

4.1. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1.1. Data Analysis Presentation

Table 4.1: Showing the questionnaire distribution results

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage %
Distributed	400	100
Retrieved	365	91
Not retrieved	35	9
Retrieved usable	341	93.4
Retrieved not usable	24	6.6

Source: Survey data, 2025

In distributing the questionnaires, 400 copies were distributed, 365 were retrieved yielding a retrieval rate of 90%. On the other hand, 35 questionnaires were not retrieved, indicating a 9% non-retrieve rate. From the 365 copies that were retrieved, 341 copies were usable, yielding a 93.4% usable rate, while 24 copies which indicate a 6.6% were not usable.

4.2. Testing of hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman rank Correlation.

4.2.1. Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between sensory experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt

Table 4.2: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of sensory experience and customer engagement

Correlations				
			Sensory experience	Customer engagement
Spearman's rho	Sensory experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.914
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	341	341
	Customer engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.914	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	341	341
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025, SPSS 23 Output

Decision:

Table 4.2. Shows the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.914 and probability value of 0.000. From the result above, it reveals that a positive and significant relationship exist between sensory experience and customer engagement. Therefore, the null hypothesis were rejected, while the alternate hypothesis were accepted, due to the fact that the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance. Indicating that, sensory experience significantly influences customer engagement.

4.2.2. Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between emotional experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 4.3: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of emotional experience and customer engagement

Correlations			Sensory experience	Cognitive engagement
Spearman's rho	Emotional experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.926
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	341	341
	Customer engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.926	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	341	341

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025, SPSS 23 Output

Decision:

The table showed the result gotten from Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis with 0.926 and probability value of 0.000. From this result, it indicates that a strong influence and significant relationship exist between emotional experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted due to the fact, the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance, which shows that emotional experience significantly influences customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

4.3. Discussion of the Findings

Findings of the study on the relationship between experiential marketing and customer engagement are discussed below.

i. Sensory experience significantly and positively correlates with customer engagement.

From the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient results, it shows that appeals of sensory experience is a huge attribute of experiential marketing proxies of customer engagement than they were when investigating the measures of satisfaction. It was expected that sensory experience may likely appeal or capture the portion of the proxies in customer engagement, as this outcome majorly depicts how noodles producing firms feel about themselves in relation to sensory experience or their advertisement as a major factor. The significant relationship between sensory experience and customer engagement suggests that noodles producing firms should endeavor to motivate and appeal to the mind of their customers.

Hypothesis one was formulated to examine the significant relationship that exist between sensory experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. The result was to reconcile the output on Spearman rank order correlation coefficient produced at 0.914 and p-value of 0.000 which is less than the level of significance (0.05). Going by the decision rule, it showed that sensory experience has a positive and strong relationship with customer engagement at 0.914.

Hypothesis two was further formulated to investigate the significant relationship between emotional experience and customer engagement of noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt. The result was also to reconcile the output on Spearman rank order correlation coefficient which is 0.926 and p-value of 0.000 which is less than the level of significance (0.05). Going by the decision rule, it displayed that emotional experience has a positive and strong relationship with customer engagement at 0.926.

ii. Emotional experience has a significant and positive influence on customer engagement.

The evidence on the relationship between emotional experience and customer engagement is also seen to be significant; with emotional experience having a strong impact on the customer engagement. Specifically, emotional experience was revealed to have a strong and positive relationship with customer engagement.

5.1. CONCLUSION

The study strictly, examined the relationship that exists between the dimensions of the predictor variable and the criterion variable. The two hypotheses raised were rejected based on the facts of the existence of significant relationship on both variables.

In the light of the above findings, the study therefore concludes that, the dimensions of the predictor variable when effectively implemented can significantly improve the level of customer engagement of the noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt.

5.2. Recommendations

In line with the stated findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made for the noodles producing firms in Port Harcourt to implement. They include as follows:

1. Effective and efficient experiential marketing should be employed as a strategy to enhance customer engagement and marketing performance.
2. Firms should invest much on consumer emotional researches to enable them know more about their consumption experience.
3. Firms should interact with their customers on consistent basis and involve them in some of their decision making.
4. Foster a sense of community by bringing people together through shared experiences that align with your brand's values.

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