

## **Shopping mall ambience and customer preference: A study of shopping malls in federal capital territory Abuja, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examined the effects of shopping mall ambience on customers choice of shopping malls in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. The study specifically investigated how parking space, product display, and location affect customers choice or preference for one shopping mall over another in terms of patronage motive, repeat purchase, and referral. A survey design method was adopted for the research. The researcher used customer population of 480 which also served as the sample size for the study. The 480 customers were shared equally to the six area councils that make up the Federal Capital Territory – Abaji, Abuja, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali with judgmental sampling method with each council getting 80 respondents while the individual respondents from each council were randomly selected through convenience sampling technique. The research instrument for the study was questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed with Spearman Rank Order Correlation. At the end of the research, the result showed that parking space, product display, and location positively and significantly affect the buying behaviour of the customers in terms of preference of one shopping mall over another. The study concluded that shopping mall ambience have positive and significant effects on customers preference for one shopping mall over another in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja and by implication, Nigeria as a whole.*

*Keywords: Location, patronage motive, parking space, product display, referral, repeat purchase*

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### **1. Introduction**

Customer preference is a marketing word that generally refers to how customers select products, services, and even retail outlets based on their references, dislikes, and level of satisfaction. Customer preference or choice in the words of Myers (2010) is the act of selecting, picking, or deciding between two or more options. Explaining further, Myers pointed out that preference is a variety of distinct things from which one can choose from. Myers therefore explained that preference in the aspect of purchasing decisions is all about the freedom to choose between or among alternative products, services, and retail outlets that offers maximum satisfaction and value for money.

In business, several factors influence or affect customers purchasing decisions in terms of preference for shopping mall to patronize among numerous alternatives and ambience are some of them. Basically, shopping mall ambience refer to the physical environment and atmosphere of a shopping mall. They consist of the tangible elements that create an immersive experience for customers, influencing their emotions, behaviour, and perception of a shopping mall and the products or services within the mall. Gowrishankar (2020), opined that shopping mall ambience represent an environment that is created to generate a stimulus among the customers perceptions and emotions that will affect their purchasing behaviour.

Interestingly, there are extant researches in different parts of the world that deal with the effects or influence of shopping mall ambience on customers or consumers buying behaviour in terms of preference for one shopping mall over another. Some of the extant researches are: Gowrishankar (2020) in India, Dashrath and Kishor (2023) in Malaysia, Nur et al (2021) in Pakistan, Cristina and Jean-Pierre (2020) in Britain, Custers et al (2022) in United States of America, Cho and Lee (2020) in China, and Hyunjoo et al (2023) in Japan.

A close look at all the extant researches cited above shows that none of them was done in Nigeria. That is the lacuna or geographical gap that the current research fills by adding to the extant researches the research with Nigerian background as the idiosyncrasies of consumers in different parts of the world may not be the same. When completed, the finding(s) of the research will form its contribution to knowledge in the area.

The problem of this study is centred on the recent complain by the Federal Capital Development Administration (FCDA) on what the administration called unprofessional design in terms of lighting, parking space, music, product display, etc and siting of shopping malls in the city which the administration claimed are constituting public nuisance, disorganizing the master plan of the city, and negatively affecting the social life of the resident of the city.

While some public commentators rightly or wrongly believed that the ambience are marketing strategies deliberately designed to attract and convince customers to patronize one shopping mall over other competitors and therefore do not constitute any public nuisance, others simply assert that they are new architectural design invoke in the area of shopping malls building and construction and therefore have no correlation or relationship with marketing strategies. It is only empirical research backed-up with data that can digest, analyze, and bring out the truthfulness of these unconfirmed assumptions and that is the goal of this research.

### 1.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework explains how the variables in research interact and affect each other in order to achieve the research objective(s). Miles and Huberman (1994), explained that a conceptual framework can be in written pattern or graphical in nature. A graphical demonstration of the conceptual framework for the current research is shown below.

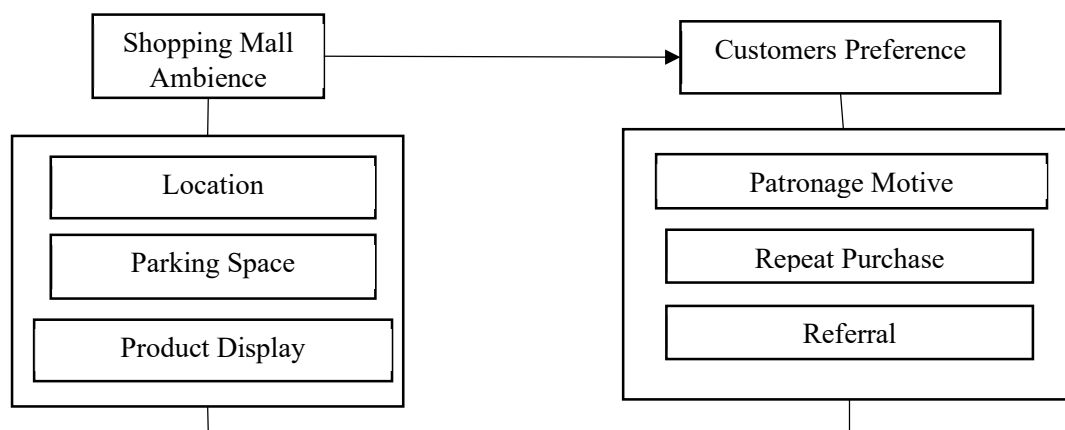


Figure 1.1: A Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Effects of Shopping Mall Ambience on Customers Preference for Shopping Malls in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. Adapted from Miles & Huberman (1994).

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Empirical Review**

In this section, some extant research that are related in one way or the other with the current research were reviewed. Their similarities identified and differences highlighted. Research on how the atmosphere of shopping malls affects customers' purchasing decisions was done by Ilakya et al. in 2022. The research was conducted in Coimbatore. The study specifically looked at how storefront, product presentation, lighting, color, and other factors affect customers' purchasing decisions. The study was descriptive in nature. A total of 150 respondents made up the research population and the study's sample size. A systematic questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. With the use of SPSS software, Linear Regression was used to evaluate the gathered data. Following analysis and interpretation of the data, the study found that every ambiance characteristic taken into account had a favorable and significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions.

Pradeep (2020) conducted research on how customers' choice of retail store type is influenced by store ambiance. India's Khaghuli Gwahati served as the study area. He especially evaluated the impact of ambiance factors on store format and, consequently, customer purchasing decisions. Survey research was used for the study. The sample size for the study was 180 respondents, who made up the population the researcher worked with. The research's data collection tool was a questionnaire. With the use of SPSS software, the gathered data was examined using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The study's findings demonstrated how store ambiance—including the storefront, lighting, product display, temperature, and other elements—has a significant impact on retailers' choices about store layout and, consequently, on customers' decisions to buy.

Dashrath and Kishor (2023) conducted a study on how the atmosphere of a shopping mall affects customers' shopping experiences. The research was conducted in Malaysia. The study primarily looked at how customers' purchasing experiences were impacted by store ambiance elements including lighting, music, color, etc. The study's research design was based on the survey. 150 respondents that were individually chosen using the convenience sampling approach made up the study's population. A questionnaire was used as the research's data collection tool. Using SPSS version 21, the collected data were subjected to Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The study's findings showed that ambiance elements had a favorable and substantial impact on customers' shopping experiences.

### **3. Methodology**

This is survey design research rooted on methodological triangulation philosophy. The population for the research consists of an estimate of 480 respondents which also served as the sample size for the study. With judgmental sampling technique, the 480 respondents were shared equally to the six area councils that make-up Federal Capital Territory Abuja consisting of Abaji, Abuja, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali with each having 80 respondents. Individual respondents from the council areas were randomly selected through convenience sampling method. The research data collection instrument was questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed with Spearman Rank Order Correlation with the aid of SPSS version 26.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

A total of 480 copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents and they were properly filled and collected back. Therefore, all decisions on this research are made on the strength of information from the valid 480 questionnaires.

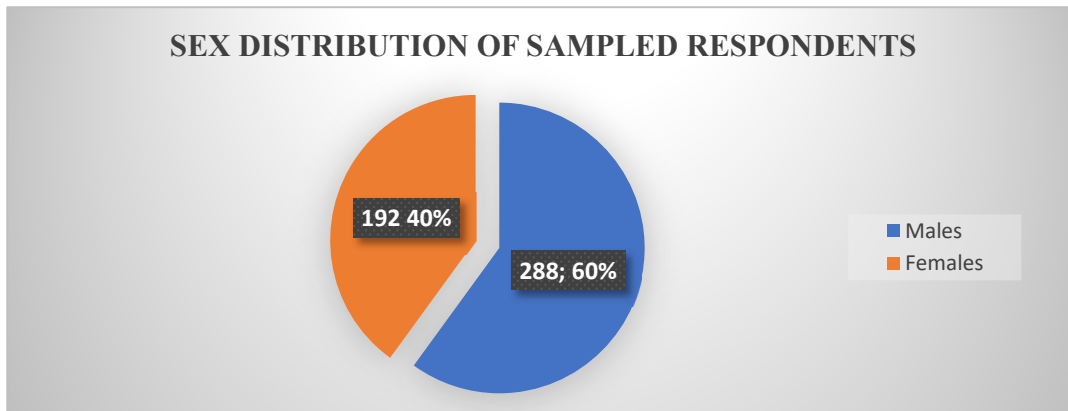


Figure 2. Biodata Analysis of the Sampled Data

The above pie chart indicates that 192 of the sampled respondents which represent 40% are females while 288 that stands for 60% are males.

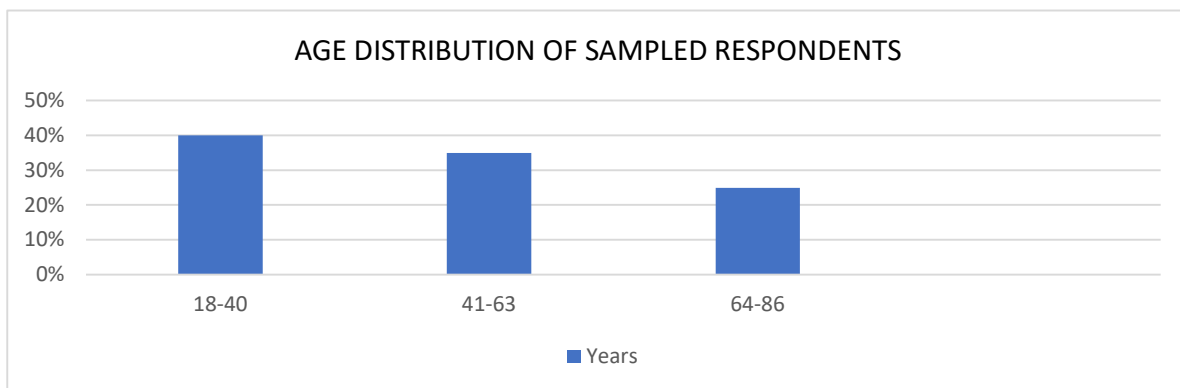


Figure 3. Age distribution of sampled response

The above bar chart shows that 40% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 18-40 years, 35% of them 41-63 years while 25% are within 64-86 years.

#### 4.1 Bivariate analysis of sampled data

A total of 9 hypotheses were tested in the research and the test carefully done with Spearman Rank Order Correlation with the aid of SPSS version 26 under the following decision rule:

0.70 – 1.00 = very strong effects

0.60 – 0.69 = strong effects

0.50 – 0.59 = moderate effects

0.40 – 0.49 = weak effects

Ho<sub>1</sub>: Location does not affect customers patronage motive for shopping malls.

**Table 1. Bivariate analysis between location and customers patronage motive**

			Location	Patronage motive
Spearman (rho)	Location	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.834**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Patronage Motive	Correlation Coefficient	.834**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

The result above shows that location has very strong positive effects on customer patronage motive (rho = .834\*\*) and the correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol \*\*

Ho<sub>2</sub>: Location has no effects on customers repeat purchase from shopping malls.

**Table 2 Bivariate analysis between location and customers repeat purchase**

			Location	Repeat Purchase
Spearman (rho)	Location	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.785**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.785**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Information from Table 2 above indicates that location has very strong positive effects on customers repeat purchase (rho = .785\*\*) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: Location does not affect customers referral for shopping malls.

**Table 3 Bivariate analysis between location and customers referral**

			Location	Referral
Spearman (rho)	Location	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.636**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Referral	Correlation Coefficient	.636**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Information from Table 3 above indicates that location has strong positive effects on customers referral (rho = .636\*\*) and the symbol \*\* shows that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Ho<sub>4</sub>: Parking space has no effect on customers patronage motive for shopping malls.

**Table 4 Bivariate analysis between parking space and customers patronage motive**

			Parking Space	Patronage Motive
Spearman (rho)	Parking Space	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.437**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Patronage Motive	Correlation Coefficient	.437**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Statistics from Table 4 above reveal that parking space has weak positive effects on customers patronage motive (rho = .437\*\*) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Ho<sub>5</sub>: Parking space does not affect customers repeat purchase from shopping malls.

**Table 5 Bivariate analysis between parking space and customers repeat purchase**

			Parking Space	Repeat Purchase
Spearman (rho)	Parking Space	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.458**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.4558**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 5 result shows that parking space has weak positive effects on customers repeat purchase (rho = .458\*\*) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Ho<sub>6</sub>: Parking space does not affect customers referral for shopping malls.

**Table 6 Bivariate analysis between parking space and customers referral**

			Parking Space	Referral
Spearman (rho)	Parking Space	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.481**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Referral	Correlation Coefficient	.481**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 6 result indicates that parking space has weak positive effects on customers referral (rho = .481\*\*) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Ho<sub>7</sub>: Product display has no effect on customers patronage motive for shopping malls.

**Table 7 Bivariate analysis between product display and customers patronage motive**

			Product Display	Patronage Motive
Spearman (rho)	Product Display	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.614**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Patronage Motive	Correlation Coefficient	.614**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 7 above demonstrates that product display has only strong positive effects on customers patronage motive ( $\rho = .614^{**}$ ) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

H<sub>08</sub>: Product display does not affect customers repeat purchase from shopping malls.

**Table 8 Bivariate analysis between product display and customers repeat purchase**

			Product Display	Repeat Purchase
Spearman (rho)	Product Display	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.632**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.632**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Statistics from Table 8 above reveal that product display has strong positive effects on customers repeat purchase ( $\rho = .632^{**}$ ) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

H<sub>09</sub>: Product display does not affect customers referral for shopping malls.

**Table 9 Bivariate analysis between product display and customers referral**

			Product Display	Referral
Spearman (rho)	Product Display	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.361**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	480	480
	Referral	Correlation Coefficient	.361**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	480	480

\*\*significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), and \*significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

The result from Table 9 above indicates that product display has very weak positive effects on customers referral ( $\rho = .361^{**}$ ) and the symbol \*\* signifies that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

At the end of analysis and interpretation of results, the research reveals that all the dimensions of shopping mall under investigation – location, parking space, and product display positively and significantly affected

the buying decisions of customers of the malls in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja in terms of their choice or preference for one shopping mall over another with regard to their patronage motive, repeat purchase, and referral.

Further analysis of the results indicates that the degree of their effects on customers patronage motive, repeat purchase, and referral also differs significantly. While the effects of some of the variables are positive and very strong, others displayed strong and weak positive effects. Some even exhibited very weak positive effects. The variation in the effects of the variables on customers choice or preference for one shopping mall over another is diagrammatically discussed with a heuristic model below.

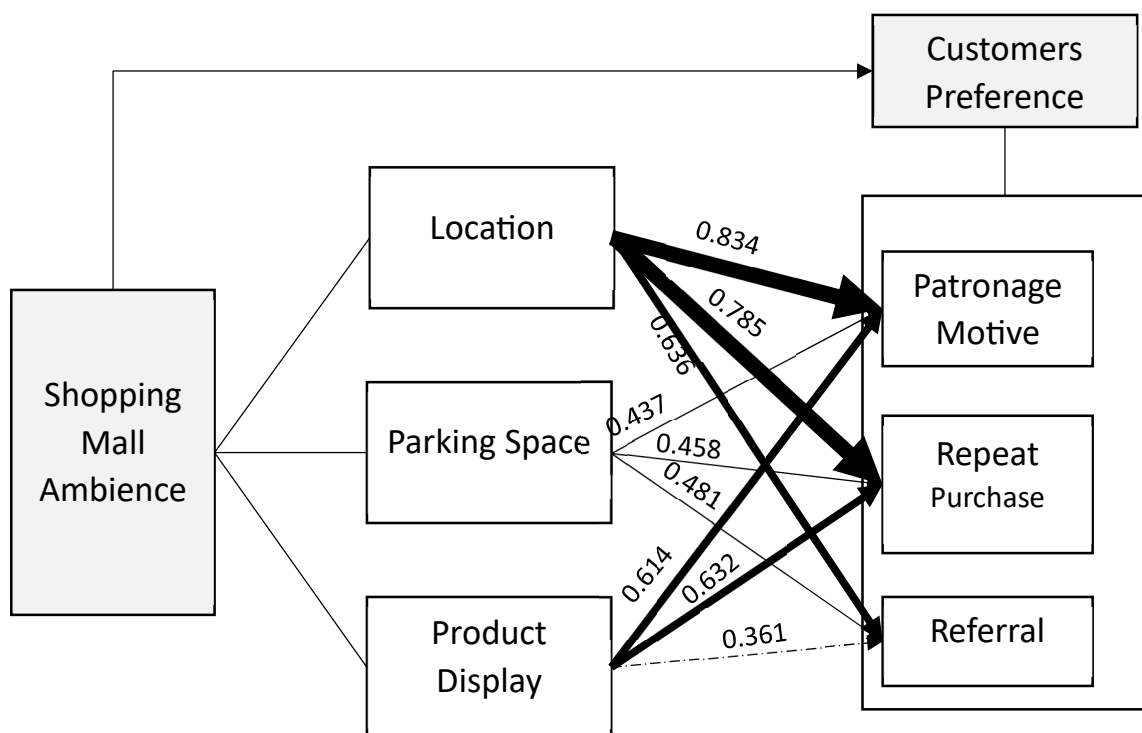


Figure 3: A heuristic model illustrating the effects of shopping mall ambience on customers preference for shopping malls in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria.

**Key Interpretation:**

- Thicker Arrow (➡) very Strong positive and significant effects
- Thick Arrow (➡) Strong positive and significant effects
- Normal Arrow (➡) Weak positive and significant effects
- Broken Arrow (-----➡) Very weak positive and significant effects

**Decision Rule:**

- 0.70 - 1.00 – Very strong effects
- 0.60 - 0.69 – Strong effects
- 0.50 – 0.59 – Moderate effects
- 0.40 - .49 – Weak effects

- 0.30 – 0.39 – Very weak effects

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that shopping mall ambience have positive and significant relationship with customers preference for one shopping mall over another in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja and by implication, Nigeria as a whole and therefore a strong determinant of where the pendulum of customers or consumers purchasing behaviour in terms of patronage motive, repeat purchase, and referral will swing to in the market.

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