

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF AMBIENT FACTORS ON PATRONAGE: A CASE OF THREE FAST FOODS RETAIL BRANDS IN MASVINGO, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Academic researches on ambient factors have proliferated over the years, however very few studies on this area have focused on Fast Food Retail Businesses. This study therefore adopts a comparative approach to examining how the ambient variables (light, music, scent, and colour) affect customers' patronage on these fast foods outlets. The focus of this paper is on the main Fast Food Retail outlets in Masvingo City (Zimbabwe), namely Chicken Inn, Food Express and Wimpy. In this study we employed a descriptive research design and the sample size was 150 respondents (90 males and 60 females) who were intercepted as they patronised these shops. The major finding of this paper is that even though we took a comparative approach to looking at the impact of ambient variables, the results confirm that indeed these have a positive effect on consumer patronage although with varying degrees of influence. Therefore, it is important that marketing practitioners are encouraged to consider the synergistic contribution of the ambient variables in order to create a comprehensively appealing environment for attracting patronage.

Keywords: Fast food retail businesses, ambient and patronage.

INTRODUCTION:

Many researchers, retailers, marketers, restaurant owners and practitioners have investigated the influence of ambient factors on consumer patronage and consumer behaviour in general (Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003). The ambient factors play a significant role in forming customers impression (Bitner, 1992) and are crucial tangible components of the service product that give cues to customers and create a perceptual image in the minds of customers (Kotler, 1973). In fact, marketers and researchers have come to acknowledge that servicescapes have been widely used as a way to evaluate intangible products, that is, the appearance and external impression of a retail business may create either a positive or negative influence on consumer patronage. The ambient factors are rich in cues which are very influential in communicating the business's image and purpose to its customers (Bitner, 1992). It is therefore important for the Food Retail Brands to appropriately mesh these variables (light, music, scent, and odour) so that they are able to appeal to the target market. However, past researches have examined the effects of individual stimuli such as music, colour, light or scent on consumer behaviour, but according to our knowledge we have not come across a research that has taken a comparative approach to see how the aforementioned variables impact on patronage. Thus in this study we are interested in investigating how the patronage of three retail businesses namely Chicken Inn, Food Express and Wimpy is affected by music, light, colour and scent.

According to Jackle and Sulle (2002), Fast food came in the 1940s after the Second World War, grew and prospered in the late 20th century, and is now considered as one of the most developed sector. Fast food is a concept that refers to ready cooked food or to food that is prepared and served quickly in restaurants, stores, kiosks and takeaways. In Zimbabwe, the Fast food Industry has and is increasingly creating benefits to the economy through employment creation

ATMOSPHERICS/ AMBIENT FACTORS:

According to Levy and Weitz (2009), store atmosphere is referred to as the attribute that aims to intensify the store environment with the combination of different cues such as lighting, color, music, and scent. Masson, Morris and Wilkinson (1993), acknowledge that ambient factors are psychogenic variables which are highly impalpable and are therefore hard to quickly remember and that these variables (i.e. scent, color, music and lighting etc), are critical in influencing and shaping behaviour while the individual will be in the store and that the very moment the individual leaves the store, these variables will cease to influence his or her future store patronage choice or purchase behavior. Donovan and Rossiter as quoted by Masson et al.(1993), suggest that, "... a store that induces feelings of alertness and excitement leads to : (1) more enjoyment when shopping in the store, (2) increased time spent browsing and exploiting the store's offerings, (3) more interactions with the store personnel, (4) a greater propensity to spent more money than initially budgeted and (5) an increased likelihood of returning to the store (future patronage)"

SCENT:

What we eat, drink and breathe are heavily influenced by gustation (sense of taste) and olfaction (sense of smell), Lahey (2009). Feldman (2009) believes that a normal human being's olfaction is capable of detecting beyond 10,000 different odors and that people have strong abilities to easily remember odors associated with long forgotten events. Thus if an individual customer is not happy with an experience in a retail store, he or she may vividly remember it each time he or she sniffs a smell which resembles that which already exists in memory. Levy and Weitz, (2009) concede to the fact that the odors are key drivers of individual buyers' emotions. Odors are believed to be key stimulants of discontent, hunger, satisfaction and nostalgia depending on the manner in which the retailer has set out scent ambient background (Levy and Weitz, 2009). From a service marketing point of view scent is a psychological moderator which enhances individual customers' moods, their emotional and evaluative responses (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Retailers should vehemently advocate for the creation of retail store facilities that are devoid of unpleasant ambient scents in order to create favorable conditions that can enhance positive customer perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Large retail stores may design store odors with fragrances that appeal to specific departmental wares with scents that have varying degrees of emotional and psychological appeals to customers (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Thus to create conducive buying atmosphere a retail store should, "smell like it is supposed to smell", (Lewison and Delozier, 1986).

COLOR:

From an artistic point of view color has the ability to invoke feelings, emotions and behaviors in different people (White and White, 2006). According to Birren, (1987), "...color in scientific and common usage refers generally to all visual sensations as conceived mentally and seen visually. Color variations can fall into any one of the seven forms namely pure colors (i.e. red, yellow, blue and green- the so called hues), white, black, gray (a combination of black and white), tints (brown, lavender, peach), shades (i.e. brown, maroon and olive), tones (i.e. tan, beige and taupe)." Color creates a very strong and lasting visual impression and image about a retailer (Lovelock, and Wirtz, 2011 and Lewison and Delozier, 1989). Since color catches the customer's attention it therefore creates either a positive or negative feeling in a customer. As quoted by Lovelock and Wirtz, (2011) the Munsell system classifies color into three broad categories on the basis of their psychological effect on retail patrons, namely hue – which suggests the names of the common ordinary colors i.e. red, green, blue, and yellow, value- which suggests the scope of vividness or dullness of the color and the chroma- which refers to the extent to which the hue is bright and dull.

Levy and Weitz, (2009) assert that colors such as red, yellow, gold or orange are deemed to be warm colors that portray love, romance, warmth, friendliness, openness among other images. Traditionally, cool colors like blue, white and green depict a serene, soothing-gentle and calming store environment. Despite all these general moods, emotions or environments created by color, diverse cultural orientations may pose challenges in designing the effective combinations of colors that can effectively spruce up the image of the retailer, especially with in mind the Fast Food retailer. There is a strong feeling that bright colors have a much more psychological appeal as compared to the so called cool colors. Masson et al, (1993), feel that warm colors do exceptionally well for low- involvement fast moving consumer goods (FMCGS) that are usually displayed in a manner designed to elicit impulse buying, while cool colors suit well for customers engaging in high-involvement purchasing decisions which require extensive problem-solving.

LIGHTING:

Lighting emerges in a variety of forms and is used for different reasons such as landscape lighting, task lighting, decorative lighting, key lighting, backlighting and accent lighting. James and Mehrabian (1976), say that lighting can be the main factor of store atmosphere that has greater impact on consumer behaviour. This means that bright light helps customers to have positive attitude towards the business or retail brand. When the store environment is brighter, buyers are likely to observe and touch the commodities in the store (Vaccaro et al., 2008). People believe that bright lights allow them to see the merchandises clearly and also some believe that it livens up the store atmosphere (Ruchi et al.).According to Levy and Weitz (2009) lighting in a shop involves more than just illuminating space. Lighting helps in creating a sense of excitement in the retail shop. This means that bright lighting induces shoppers to behave positively towards a business or a retail brand. It gives an accurate color rendition of the goods in the shop. One essential use of light is called popping the merchandise that is focusing spotlights on special items. Popping the merchandise can train shoppers 'eyes on the items and can direct strategically their attention through the shop. It has been noted that successful lighting requires expertise and latest lamp and luminaries equipment. Appropriately lit and balanced environments can give merchandise an added appeal and show unique selling points. When the store atmospheres is brighter, customers see and touch the products in the shop (Vaccaro et al., 2008).Therefore lighting has an influential impact on how customers react and finally reach at the purchase decisions. Naturally shoppers are attracted to the brightest areas of the shop, lighting techniques such as wall washing, indirect and cove lighting can be applied to lead the consumer through the store in a deliberate traffic pattern and guide the purchase decision making process.

Color works hand in glove with lighting as an important attention getter as well as the provider of color contrast which work closely with lighting. Lighting has an effect on speed of transaction, it helps in accuracy service at cashier's tables and it enhances the sale. To be effective lighting must be uniformly distributed and be bright enough to make buyers feel secure in the shop. However, over-lighting must be avoided at all cost, and be shielded luminaries must be used to prevent glare. Unwanted light as viewed from the surrounding area must be avoided as it can produce disabling glare for drivers as they approach the store.

MUSIC:

Background music is influential to the interaction between buyers and sellers and it adds their need to belong (Dube, Chebat, & Morin, 1995). The music played affects buyers' behaviour, creates image, attracts attention or controls store traffic. "Volume and tempo of music can control the crowd in store. Grewal et al (2002), in agreement with Mattilia and Wirtz, (2001), say that music is an important element in enhancing in-store feelings and emotions. Slow music results in slow, in-store traffic in supermarkets but research by Milliman (1982) shows that sales volume is higher in such an environment.

Spangenberg et al (2005) contend that music assumes different tempos such as fast and slow tempos, classical and instrumental tempos. This augmented with the times during which these are played, normally have a significant influence on consumers' moods and the time they will ultimately spend in the retail factory. (Kellaris & Altech, 1992; Kellaris & Kent, 1992), and customers' emotion (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974)

Little may be known on the effects of music to shoppers' in-store in Masvingo Zimbabwe since any type of music is played in any shop. No selection of music is matched to suit the customer social class and the times it is played. Baker et al (1994) pointed out that in-store music work well with other variables such as brand's position. Sharma and Stafford, (2000) carried out a research which indicated that musical types are more appropriate for certain stores and failure to matches the music and the shop can have negative results (Machleit and Eroglu, ; Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000).

Music needs to be used strategically in an effort to ensure 'fit' between the store's brand image and positioning (Dubé and Morin, 2001). Likewise, misfit may result in counterfactual thinking about the brand, resulting in consumers reassessing their view of the brand and searching out further information sources to form a new judgment about the brand's position (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003) When preferred music is played, customers stay longer, become more comfortable and relaxed, and are likely to order more items. The opposite is also true, when ambient noise is, fast, loud and causing discomfort, customers will spend less time in a retail shop.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES:

A number of studies on ambient factors have shown that an effectively managed service environment induce favourable attitudes towards patronising Food Retail outlets and viceversa (Bitner, 1992; Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Some previous studies have inter alia focused on the impact of servicescape: on employees and customers (Quartier, Christiaans, and Van Cleempoel, 2009); on cognition and emotions (Lin, 2004) and on consumer behaviour in a shopping mall (Michon, Chebat, and Turley, 2005). However, this study differs from the previous studies in that it takes a comparative approach. It is against this background that we trace research hypotheses for the four variables under study and examine how these variables comparatively impact on patronage of three prominent retail food brands in Masvingo. According to a research on olfaction by Bone and Ellen (1999), there is no substantial evidence to suggest that scent affects consumer behaviour in a retail set up, yet various researchers and authors have repeatedly confirmed that scent influences consumer behaviour either positively or negatively (Levy and Weitz, 2009, Feldman, 2009 and Lewison and DeLozier, 1986). Therefore our first hypothesis states that:

H1: *Scent has positive effects on patronage across the three Food retail Brands*

Although several scholars (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, Lewison and DeLozier, 1989, Levy and Weitz, 2009) have acknowledged that warm colours influence consumer purchase behaviour positively. However, investigations by Bellizzi et al, (1983) have indicated that despite the fact that warm colors have magic abilities to attract consumers into the stores, it was also found out that environments with red backgrounds were generally unwelcoming, tense and highly unattractive compared to store environments adorned by the so called cool colors. Therefore our 3rd hypothesis states that:

H2: *Different color backgrounds for Food Retail brands have a differential influence on patronage.*

The suitability of lighting is contingent to different impressions that it creates in the minds of consumers. While Mehrabian (1976) asserts that brightly lit environments are more inviting than poorly lit ones,

Layman, (1989) and Ragneskog, Brane, Karlsson and Kihlgren (1996) have content that soft lighting has an influence on consumption of food. It increases the eating duration and it also enhances comfort of patrons. It has been established that unfriendly and extremely bright lighting impacts negatively on the time spent by a customer eating (Sommer, 1969).

H3: Satisfaction with lighting has a positive effect on customer patronage.

Milliman (1986) assert that music affects traffic flow, sales volume or stock turnover, dining speed, money spent and the amount of time spent in a restaurant. Although background music is believed to appeal to a consumer subconsciously as he or she will be in the store, Smith and Curnow (1996) and Blackwell and Miniad (1996) claim that highly pitched music volumes in the store encourage the least amount of time spent by patrons.

H4: Background music positively impact on patronage

METHODOLOGY:

POPULATION & SAMPLE:

The target population consisted of all the customers who patronised the three prominent Fast Food Retail Brands namely: Chicken Inn, Wimpy and Food Express as these were the custodians of the relevant research data and information needed to answer the research questions. The management and employees were also part of the population. They were included on the basis that they could give us a clear picture on how the variables of ambiance affect patronage in their organisations. The sample size for this study was 150 (females 90 and 60 males) and we employed convenience sampling method. The rationale behind such an approach was that it allowed the researchers the opportunity to use their discretion to select respondents deemed to be true representatives of the targeted population.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT:

The researchers used a structured questionnaire which gave respondents the leeway to fill in their responses on comparative rating scale for listed attributes. The entire questionnaire had four main components (scent, music, color and lighting), disintegrated into four constituent elements for each variable as follows: scent (lemon, lavender, peppermint, mixed & no scent); music (classical, gospel, sungura, reggae, rap, hip-hop & no music); color (warm, cool, black and white, shades & others) and lighting (task, parking lot, decorative, highlighting, & others). The questionnaires were interviewer-administered at the three fast food retail outlets during lunch hours and over weekends for a period of two weeks and respondents were screened on the basis of the frequency with which they patronize the place. An equal number (50) of questionnaires were administered at each of the three chosen outlets.

PILOT-TESTING:

The questionnaire was pre-tested on 15 respondents (ten percent of the sample size) before the actual data collection in a bid to identify the weaknesses of the instrument. The first pre-test detected some flaws and these were rectified. However, the researchers felt that it was also necessary to do a second round of the pre-test, this was executed and it allowed the researchers to come up with an almost flawless questionnaire which was then finally employed to collect data. The pre-test results were not included in this paper.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:

The data collected for this research were analyzed using SPSS. A multiple regression model was employed which sought to establish the comparative impact that ambient variables (scent, colour, lighting and music) have on patronage for the three fast food brands (Chicken Inn, Food Express and Wimpy). We further split the ambient variables into five constituent parts of each variable, as follows; Scent (lemon, lavender, mint, mixed and not scented); Colour (warm, cool, black and white, shades and others); Lighting ;(task, parking lot, decorative, highlighting and others) and music (classical, gospel, sungura, reggae and no music). The

rationale behind taking this approach was to examine the contribution of each sub-variable before looking at the synergistical contribution. The results of the findings are presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Comparative Results of the Effect of Scent on Patronage

Variable	Model	Chicken Inn			Food Express			Wimpy		
		Standardised Coefficients			Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients		
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
	Constant			.000		6.578	.000		6.206	.000
Scent	Lemon	-.064	-.612	.542	.078	.745	.458	.125	1.064	.289
	Lavender	.020	.186	.852	-.088	-.813	.418	.109	1.046	.298
	Mint	-.096	-.915	.362	.104	.948	.345	-.005	-.046	.963
	Mixed	-.036	-.334	.739	.078	.787	.433	-.147	-1.514	.133
	Not scented	.091	.918	.361	.020	.192	.848	-.095	-.929	.355
Scent average		-.064	-.696	.488	-.003	-.030	.976	.069	.678	.499

According to the results in the table above, lemon scent has a more meaningful contribution towards patronage as evidenced by lemon's contribution for Wimpy ($t = 1.064$) which has a comparatively better effect than chicken Inn ($t = -.612$) and Food Express ($t = .745$). In a similar manner lavender scent has a more positive contribution for Wimpy ($t = 1.046$) as compared to Chicken Inn which has a lesser contribution ($t = .186$) and Food Express which has a least contribution ($t = -.813$). The mint scent has also shown a low contribution towards patronage although its effect has been more defined for Food Express ($t = .948$) than for Chicken Inn ($t = -.915$) and Wimpy ($t = -.046$). Although mixed scents are used by all the three brands, the contribution towards patronage is generally weak for all of them. However, mixed scent has worked better for Food Express ($t = .787$) as compared to the other two Chicken Inn ($t = -.334$) and Wimpy ($t = -1.514$). Although no scent implies that customers would rely on the natural odours, it has shown that natural scents have had more impact on patronage for Chicken Inn ($t = .918$) as compared to Food Express ($t = .020$) and Wimpy ($t = -.929$).

The scent average results depict a collective contribution of scent variables towards enhancing patronage for the three retail brands. The results confirm that scent has a positive contribution towards consumer patronage as shown by the mean t-test values of Chicken Inn (-.696), Food Express (-.030) and Wimpy (0.678) which all fall within the acceptable range. Therefore we confirm the first hypothesis which states that scent has positive effects on patronage across the three retail brands.

The table below shows the results of the findings on the comparative impact of colour on patronage on Chicken Inn, Food Express, and Wimpy.

Table 2: Comparative Results on the Impact of Colour on Patronage

Variable	Model	Chicken Inn			Food Express			Wimpy		
		Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients		
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
	Constant			.000		6.578	.000		6.206	.000
Colour	Warm	-.095	-.847	.399	.019	.173	.863	.116	1.187	.238
	Cool	-.130	-1.197	.234	.077	.710	.479	-.144	-1.446	.151
	Whit & black	.038	.365	.716	.023	.215	.830	.156	1.605	.111
	Shades	-.021	-.198	.844	.114	1.133	.260	.065	.655	.514
	Others	.017	.169	.866	-.004	-.036	.971	-.146	-1.486	.140
Colour average		-.215	-2.336	.021	.167	1.843	.068	-.005	-.057	.955

The results on the above table depict that colour has a significant and varying contribution to patronage. Findings reflect that warm colours have appealed to consumers better for Wimpy ($t = 1.187$) than for Chicken Inn ($t = -.847$) and Food Express ($t = .173$). Although consumers acknowledge that cool colours affect patronage, that effect differs from brand to brand as demonstrated by ($t = .710$) for Food Express, ($t = -1.446$) for Wimpy, and $t = -1.197$ for Chicken Inn. Despite showing limited contribution towards patronage black and white colours have shown dominance in attracting customers for Wimpy ($t = 1.605$) as compared

to Chicken Inn ($t = .365$) and Food Express ($t = .215$). Shades are generally not in popular use in food retail industry although results from respondents indicate that Food Express ($t = 1.133$) uses appealing shades more than Chicken Inn ($t = -.198$) and Wimpy ($t = .655$). Besides the use of the above colours the three retail brands have also used other colours.

The average findings on colour variable for Chicken Inn fall outside the acceptable range ($t = -2.336$) and therefore we reject the second hypothesis that colours have differential effects on patronage. Yet the other two fast food retail shops have their t-test results falling within the acceptable range, that is, Food express has ($t = 1.843$) and Wimpy has ($t = -.057$). Therefore we accept the second hypothesis that colours have differential effects on patronage. This concurs with Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) and Levy and Weitz (2009) who indicated that colours play a crucial contribution towards consumers' purchase behaviour.

The following table summarises how the results of how lighting influences patronage on the three retail brands.

Table 3. Comparative Results on the Impact of Lighting on Patronage

Variable	Model	Chicken Inn			Food Express			Wimpy		
		Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients		
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
	Constant			.000		6.578	.000		6.206	.000
Lighting	Task	-.085	-.765	.446	-.281	-2.413	.017	-.070	-.745	.458
	Lot	.114	.986	.326	-.095	-.851	.397	.029	.260	.796
	Decor	-.030	-.269	.788	-.141	-1.425	.157	-.113	-1.211	.229
	Highlighting	.090	.809	.420	.108	1.033	.304	.056	.529	.598
	Others	.019	.170	.865	.183	1.878	.063	-.059	-.582	.562
Lighting average		.090	.951	.343	-.087	-.910	.365	.026	.276	.783

Generally, consumers have acknowledged that lighting affects their frequency of visits to the retail brands. While task lighting is key in enhancing attraction in other retail businesses, it was noted that for Fast Food Retail brands its contribution towards patronage is insignificant as reflected by an outlier value of ($t = -2.413$) for Food Express and a relatively weak appeal for both Chicken Inn ($t = -.765$) and Wimpy ($t = -.745$) consumers. Consumers have revealed that parking lot lighting is vital to the extent that they prefer to patronize Chicken Inn ($t = .986$) as compared to Wimpy ($t = .260$) and Food Express ($t = -.851$) especially during the night. Despite the importance of decorative lighting in enhancing beauty in the eyes of customers, its contribution has been comparatively less significant to the three retail brands with Chicken Inn ($t = -.269$), Wimpy ($t = -1.211$) and Food Express ($t = -1.425$) It is evident that highlighting plays a significant role in influencing patronage as depicted on the table. Results show that Food Express ($t = 1.033$) outwits the other competitors, Chicken Inn ($t = .808$) and Wimpy ($t = .529$) respectively. Food Express has successfully managed to infuse other forms of lighting with the former (task, lot, décor, and highlighting) as reflected by t-test result of (1.878) in attracting store traffic.

The computed average for lighting reveals that the t- tests results for the three fast food retail shops fall within the acceptable region with Chicken Inn having ($t = .951$), Food Express ($t = -.910$) and Wimpy ($t = .276$) Therefore we accept the third hypothesis that lighting has a positive effect on attracting customers to the shops.

The last table depicts the comparative results of the effects of music genres on patronage of the three retail brands.

Table 4 Comparative Results on the Impact of Music on Patronage

Variable	Model	Chicken Inn			Food Express			Wimpy		
		Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients		
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
	Constant			.000		6.578	.000		6.206	.000
Music	Classical	-.031	-.264	.792	.340	2.723	.008	.120	1.092	.277
	Gospel	-.101	-.821	.414	-.225	-1.825	.071	.040	.378	.706
	Sungura	-.034	-.277	.783	-.091	-.859	.392	.152	1.455	.148
	Reggae	.155	1.276	.205	-.071	-.636	.526	.136	1.386	.168
	No music	.072	.668	.506	.144	1.213	.228	-.015	-.141	.889
Music average		.117	1.287	.201	.086	.949	.344	.174	1.931	.056

Music influences consumers in diverse ways. The findings show that classical music plays a significant contribution to Wimpy ($t = 1.092$) and Chicken Inn ($t = -.264$). Consumers have indicated that classical music does not in any way influence their frequency of patronage to Food Express as shown by the t-test result of 2.723

which falls out of the acceptable range of ± 2 . While gospel music is played in the three retail brands it has limited influence in attracting customers into the store. This is evidenced by the t-test results which reveal that the aforementioned type of music has the highest contribution to patronage on Wimpy ($t = .378$), followed by Chicken Inn ($t = -.821$) and anchored by Food Express ($t = -1.825$). Generally sungura music is a popular genre in Zimbabwe and results have revealed that Wimpy dominates the other two retail brands in playing sungura music as weaponry for attracting traffic. This is reflected by the following t-test results viz, Wimpy ($t = 1.455$), Food Express ($t = .859$) and Chicken Inn ($t = -.277$). Reggae is an overall played popular type of music that has managed to appeal across ages, cultures and nations. For this reason it receives wide attention to most consumers as witnessed by its contribution to patronage on the three retail brands. Comparatively it has worked best for Wimpy ($t = 1.386$), better for Chicken Inn ($t = 1.276$) and good for Food Express ($t = -.636$).

The average computations for music for the three Fast Food Retail shops, that is, Chicken Inn ($t = 1.287$), Food Express ($t = .949$) and Wimpy ($t = 1.931$) fall in the acceptable region and therefore is imminent to accept the fourth hypothesis that background music positively influences consumers' patronage.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Managers should be cognisant of the fact that while each ambient factor may contribute significantly to patronage, the concept of synergy (that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) should be applied, where well blended ambient variables have a more consolidated effect on consumer patronage. It should be acknowledged that coming up with an optimum blend calls for hands on experience of each individual manager as dictated by the retail context where it operates. Despite these, the influence of other factors which are uncontrollable such as accessibility, reputation of the brand and others may contribute towards enhancing patronage. Managers therefore should look at patronage from a more holistic perspective. People may also be attracted into a shop by other factors such as cleanliness, price and so on.

FURTHER RESEARCH:

This research took a comparative approach to investigating the impact of ambient variables on consumer patronage on a micro-scale, therefore it is noble not to generalise these findings. It is upon this background that we recommend further studies on this issue at macro perspective so that a more conclusive research could be carried out. It is also important to note that the Fast Food Retail Shops are dynamic in nature and it may be prudent to carry out similar researches in order to monitor how these variables affect the industry in varying times and different socioeconomic conditions.

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