# BRAND PERCEPTION AND GUESTS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF HOTELS IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE NIGERIA

By

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## ABSTRACT:

This study sought to examine the influence of brand perception on guests' purchase intention of hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study was guided by four research questions and it was hypothesised that there is no significant relationship between the dimensions of brand perception (which comprises perceived product quality, price perception, perceived brand awareness and perceived brand image) and purchase intention. A sample size of one hundred and eleven (111) respondents was drawn from 32 hotels in Port Harcourt using the cluster sampling technique. Pearson Moment Correlation Technique was used in testing the hypotheses at 95% level of confidence. It was found that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between perceived product quality, price perception, and brand image and purchase intention with r score of 0.821, 0.900 and 0.972 respectively. Meanwhile brand awareness was proved to have a moderate relationship with purchase intention with r value of 0.688. It was found that the use of social media marketing strategy is still at its cradle in the hotel industry in Port Harcourt. Consequently, the study recommended that hotel management should strive to improve the brand image of their hotels by creating multiple marketing strategies that will improve the perception of their target audience about the hotels. It is also imperative for hotel managers to take advantage of social media marketing platforms to create positive awareness and communication with the public. This will help boost their image and ultimately induce guests' patronage.

## KEYWORDS:

Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Brand Perception, Perceived Product Quality, Price Perception and Purchase Intention.

## Introduction

The hospitality sector is not an exception to the rule that business organizations frequently seek to gain competitive advantage over their rivals by continually looking for ways to outperform their competitor; in fact, the hospitality sector has recently experienced competitions that are thought to be fiercer and more intense than ever before. With the advent of smart business approaches, technology, social media marketing, and a focus on providing excellent service, hospitality businesses have made an effort to hold a prominent place in the minds of their target market; the main objective is to draw clients' patronage. As the most essential service needed by tourists once they arrive at their destinations and as a crucial service provider in the tourism and hospitality sector, hotel companies have come to understand the value of branding strategies as source of gaining competitive advantage and service differentiation (Choi & Chu ,2001;Kim & Kim, 2005).

Therefore, it is impossible to overstate the significance of brand perception. It is disappointing to notice that branding is still not acknowledged as a source of competitive advantage in the Nigerian hotel sector, particularly in Port Harcourt hotels, despite the high amount of attention the notion has earned in the hotel business across numerous countries. The majority of academics and hotel managers place a strong emphasis on service delivery, service systems, and operations management while relegating brand perception to a supporting role. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the gaps in the literature that this research aimed to fill.

The difficulties with this research originated from the fact that Port Harcourt's hotel companies operate in a fiercely competitive market where one must outperform the other to survive. Hoteliers must discover methods to differentiate their goods and services from those of their rivals in the fiercely competitive hotel sector, where goods and services have become commodities (Mattila, 2006). Hotel managers need to understand that placing their brands in the minds of their target market should be their top goal, and that this can only be done by having a favourable view of their brands. Branding is one of the most important developments in the global hotel business as a result of the adoption of branding tactics as a source of distinction and competitive advantage (Pappu et al., 2005; Kim & Kim, 2005). Similar to this, Kayamanand Arasli, (2007) explained that individuals nowadays often spend a significant amount of time on social media websites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. This applies to both leisure and amusement activities as well as the performance of consumption-related behaviours (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

The replacement of the traditional media channels (such as radio and television) with social media channels by consumers calls for realignment or change of marketing communication strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Foux, 2006). As a consequence, conventional marketing strategies have undergone a paradigm change in an effort to promote excellent brand image. In addition, hotel managers do not have exclusive market control, thus it is crucial to position their brand to attract customers. The purpose of this work is to address these noted difficulties. So, the goal of this research is to investigate the connection between hotel brand impression and patrons' desire to buy in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The research concentrated on the psychological aspects of brand perception, such as perceived product quality, pricing perception, brand awareness, and brand image in predicting guests' purchase intentions, in order to fulfil its objectives.

## Literature Review
## Theoretical Review

The Expectation-Confirmation Theory serves as the foundation for this research. This is a multi-dimensional theory that states that perception, prospect, and perceived performance all contribute to

visitor satisfaction and, as a result, their purchasing patterns (Oliver, 1997). The notion is based on a positive or negative disconfirmation relationship between expectations and performance. When a product exceeds consumers' expectations, future buy behaviour occurs; nevertheless, when expectations of a product or service are not met, customers are likely to be unsatisfied, resulting in negative post-purchase behaviour (Oliver, 1997; Spreng et al.1996). Analytically, the idea states that a product's or service's brand perception shapes visitors' expectations, which eventually leads to choices or intentions to patronize such product at some point in the future, whilst actual experience affects repurchase intentions (Halstead, 1999; Spreng et al.1996). As a result, disconformity is defined as a personal choice made by consumers based on a comparison of their service expectations and their opinions about the actual service received (McKinney Et Al., 2003; Spreng et al.1996). This theory is relevant to this study because it substantiates that, while guests' satisfaction in relation to their expectations shapes their judgement and decisions on repurchase behaviour, brand perception (which shapes consumers' expectations) is a major force that induces guests' purchase intentions in the first place. Before making the option to return, visitors must first be aware of and willing to patronize the hotel. As a result, hotel managers must endeavour to ensure that their marketing efforts are tailored to obtaining a credible brand perception in the minds of their target market.

**Conceptual Review**

A fairly detailed discussion of the major concepts of this study has been presented below. This is to enable the reader to have a fair grasp and understanding of the concepts as they pertain to the study. The construct is captured in the conceptual framework below:
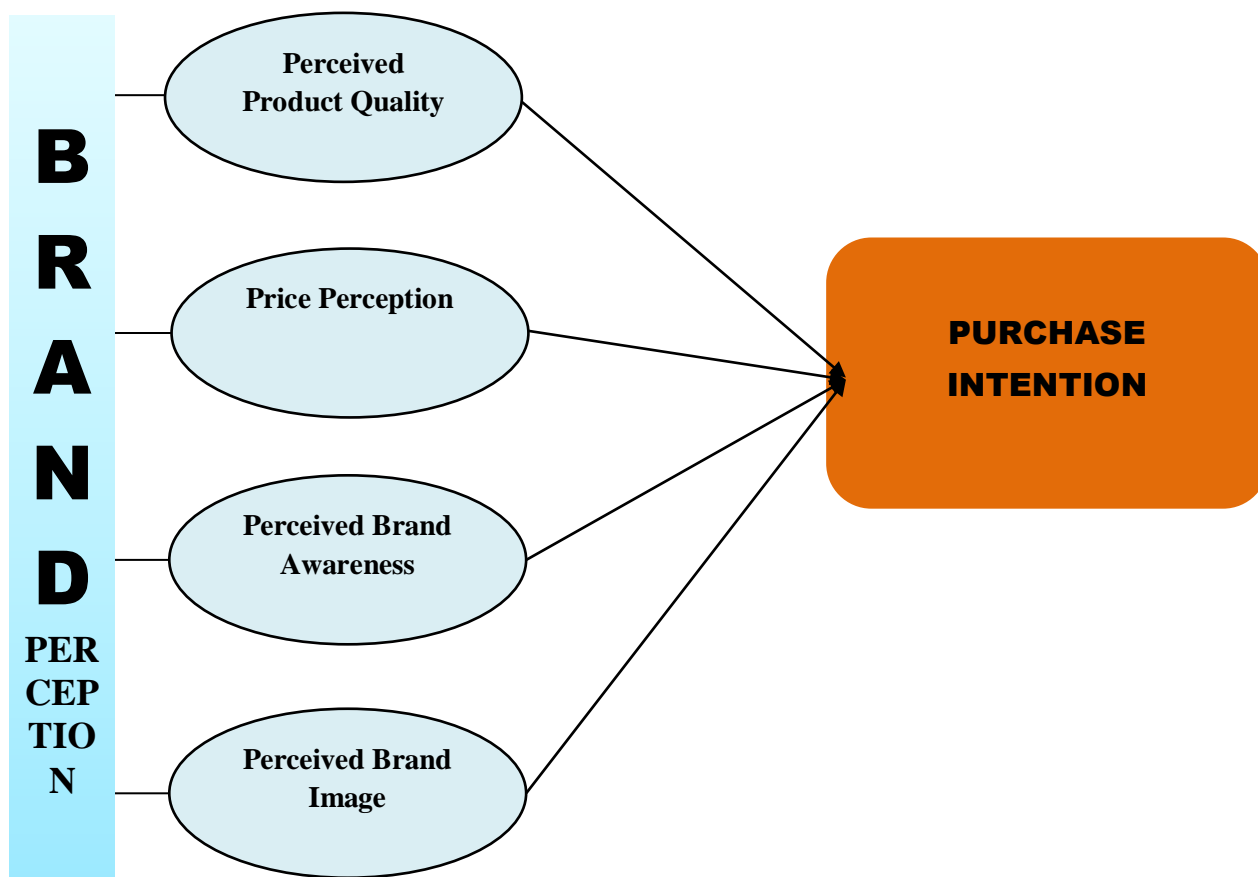


**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study**
**Source: Researchers' Conceptualisation**

## The Concept of Brand Perception

A brand, sometimes known as a trademark, is a term, phrase, symbol, or combination of words and symbols that a corporation uses to identify its identity, brand, or goods from those of others. Simply explained, a brand is the distinct identity of a product or firm that differentiates it from competitors. Companies invest significant efforts in developing brand awareness and convincing customers to identify specific positive traits with their businesses. Customers may be more trusting of well-known companies, which may impact purchasing behaviour. Branding aids in the marketing of a product (Angelmar, Angelmar& Kane, 2007). Sen (1999) contends that when a customer observes a brand for which he is already familiar, all information closely related to that brand is instantly retrieved. As a result, brand plays an important role in product recognition. A well-known brand may have a significant influence on customer perception. Consumer brand perception is an important component of brand equity, making it a vital component of practically every marketing plan. Understanding the conceptual and psychological factors involved in brand perception and brand attitude allows managers to more effectively use and maximize the underlying cognitive processes, as well as grow, change, and leverage a brand's perception in the eyes of the customer.

Perception is a psychological process. It entails an individual's attempt to choose, organize, and analyse information supplied in order to construct a meaningful picture of the topic, event proposal, etc. We experience the world via one or more of our five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. As a result, the term sensation cannot be separated from perception (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001).

## Brand equity perception components

Brand association is a critical component of brand perception. According to studies, having an efficient marketing communication strategy is a common aspect in establishing favourable brand perception. According to Delassus and Descotes (2012), good brand perception is the outcome of successful marketing tactics, and marketers are responsible for establishing brand dimensionality. Marketers also help to shape brands' values and ideals, resulting in good connections in customers' thoughts and a favourable attitude toward the brand. Customers choose things that match their image, and they convey their personality or qualities via products that match their self-image (Foroudi et al., 2017; Sirgy, 1982). Brand perception and its variables are strongly linked to self-concept. It is essentially based on customers' perceptions of the brand (and its associated usefulness) rather than any objective measures (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Voorhees et al., 2015).

Numerous scholars who have examined this agree that brand equity is "the combination of traits and obligations associated with a brand," as defined by Aaker (1991). Several writers (Broyles et al., 2010; Cornwell et al., 2011) based their incremental definitions on Aaker's (1991, 2009) concept. According to Chang and Hung (2013), a variety of marketing actions may affect a consumer's impression of the brand's image, hence influencing the consumer's view of the degree of brand equity. For the purposes of this study, the researcher adopted a multi-factor measure approach to brand perception from the viewpoint of consumers, using metrics often used in the hospitality sector. These are as follows: perceived product quality, perceived pricing, perceived brand awareness, and perceived brand image. They have been briefly reviewed as they pertain to this research.

## Perceived Product Quality

Perceived quality is a key component of brand perception. It describes intangible impressions, judgements, ideas, and beliefs regarding a product's quality (Ramaseshan& Tsao, 2007). Brand perception, according to Lassar et al. (1995), is the outcome of a combination of attractiveness and

perceived quality and it is a physical feature. Additionally, pricing is related to perceived quality. That instance, when customers see greater pricing for comparable items, they may perceive a higher level of quality. Positive perceptions regarding the brand are influenced by perceived quality (Fatima et al., 2013). Perceived quality promotes favourable association with the brand. . In the hotel sector, customers generate an opinion about the quality of the product based on their observations of the facilities and hotel ratings. Hotel management must rely on marketing methods that highlight the quality and distinctive features of their properties to the target audience. Azadeh, Ghaderi, and Fazli (2007) discovered that poor quality items are disliked and that profit may be raised by enhancing quality. Papic (2007) discovered that in order for company managers to achieve desired success, they must aim to meet and exceed consumers' expectations. According to Herrmann, Huber, Shao, and Bao (2007), pricing usually reflects product quality. The purpose of this research was to see whether perceived quality may influence purchasing intent in Port Harcourt hotels.

## Price Perception

Price perception refers to customers' proclivity to use pricing to evaluate product quality (Nurul &Euis, 2017).The price of a product has a significant impact on customer perception. Despite the fact that the vast majority of customers enjoy and prefer cheap or decently priced goods, there are other segments of intelligent and sceptical consumers that look down on a product that is much less expensive than the alternatives. Many intelligent buyers label the goods as cheap and unfit for use, even though it is of the same high quality. As a result, the price of a product or service should be the foundation of a bigger marketing strategy. By doing so, even low-cost items may be sold as high-quality and low-cost alternatives. As a result, hotel management must carefully establish prices that are both enticing to customers and adequate to generate a sustainable profit that will support the company.

## Brand Awareness

Brand awareness describes the existence of a brand in the memory and thoughts of customers (Cornwell et al., 2011). Its significance for brand equity is proportionate to the degree of awareness generated by the brand (Yasin et al., 2007). That is, the greater the amount of awareness, the greater the brand perception. When people are aware of a brand, it is more likely to be picked over lesser-known brands. There are two major components to brand awareness: remembering and recognizing (Keller, 2008). The capacity of customers to appropriately develop and retrieve the brand in their memory is referred to as brand recall (Keller, 1993). When people distinguish one brand from another, this is known as brand recognition (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995; Homburg et al., 2010). These facts are connected because if buyers can recollect the brand outside of the shop, they will be able to identify the brand at the point of purchase. A brand may be recognised by its name, packaging, location, or form, as well as its ability to influence purchasing intentions, but brand memory is not required to generate purchasing intentions. According to Yasin et al (2007) when a brand is remembered and recognized, it is more likely to be chosen. It is well understood that brand awareness is vital for developing brand perception (Aaker, 2009).

## Brand Image

Brand image is a very important component of brand perception (Keller, 1993). Authors (Aaker, 1991; Kotler, 1998) agree that brand image refers to associations in consumers' minds, beliefs built around the brand, uniqueness that distinguishes brands from others, personal symbolism that buyers associate with a brand, and general brand impressions about the brand rather than the product. Moreover, brand image may be seen as a communication instrument (both direct and indirect) and

assessed in terms of identity. According to Gummerus et al. (2011), brand image should be based on qualities, individual perceptions, personal values, experiences, brand type, and background. Keller (1993) postulated three brand image dimensions: qualities, advantages, and attitudes. A brand with a strong brand image may provide customers with a point of difference while also generating better financial returns (Hussey and Duncombe, 1999). Brands with a poor image, on the other hand, have the opposite impact (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995; Ewing et al., 2011).

**Empirical Review**

Nurul and Euis (2017) discovered that product quality, brand image, and pricing perception all had a favourable impact on purchase choices. Muharam and Euis (2017) also stated that product quality, brand image, and pricing perception all affected purchase choices considerably. Moreover, Amron (2018) discovered that brand image, brand trust, product quality, and pricing all had a favourable influence on customers' purchase choices.

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), "the core of the marketing campaign is the product." To have a competitive edge, businesses must produce goods or services that reflect the values that customers demand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Amron (2018) observed that perceived quality had a beneficial influence on purchase choices in his research. According to Muharam and Euis (2017), perceived quality affects purchase choices. In their study, Fatmawati and Soliha (2017) discovered that perceived quality had a beneficial influence on purchase choices.

Nurul and Euis (2017) discovered that pricing perception influenced consumer purchase choices positively. Harwani and Pradita (2017) discovered that pricing perception affected purchase choices in their study. Muharam and Euis (2017) explained similar findings, namely that price perception positively influenced purchase choices.

. Chen-Yu et al. (2016) investigated the link between these two factors in online clothes buying and discovered that brand image-congruence has a positive and substantial influence on brand repurchase intention. Brand image-congruence has a considerable influence on brand loyalty. Customers who have a high degree of consistency between their brand image and their self-image are more likely to buy the goods on a regular basis or to make repeat purchases. Foster (2016) discovered that brand image had a beneficial effect on purchase choices in his research. In their study, Nurul and Euis (2017) discovered that brand image had a beneficial influence on customer purchase choices. Amron (2018) discovered that brand image has a beneficial influence on buying choices.

The above research clearly indicates that the process of creating relationships between customers and brands comprises several aspects and a complex approach. Unfortunately, these researches did not take into account brand perception when analysing consumers' purchasing intentions, particularly in hotel settings.

**Methodology**

The study adopted the survey approach of quasi-experimental research design was adopted. In using this method, the researchers made observations and generated data from the study sample which was analysed and the result used to make inference upon the population. The population of the study consisted of guests of hotels in Port Harcourt City which according to Hotels-ng (2023) amount to 411.However, it was not practically feasible for researchers to reach all these hotels which are spread across the study area within the scheduled time frame. Therefore, using cluster and convenient sampling techniques the sampled hotels shall comprise hotels located in strategic arrears of Port Harcourt city which include Aba road, Ikwerre road, Stadium Road, Government Residential Areas,

and Old Port Harcourt Town, Diobu areas which amounts to 32. Thus 10 copies of the research instrument (questionnaire designed in 5-point likert format) was distributed to the sampled hotels which resulted to a sample size of 320 respondents (32 X 10).

The researcher used the triangulation of techniques strategy to collect data for this study. Data was gathered from primary source only. In order to accomplish this, the researcher used a questionnaire to collect data from primary sources. To validate the instrument, copies were submitted to experts in the field for feedback on the instrument's several areas of validity. These suggestions were assessed and included into the final draft, which served to ensure the instrument's face and content validity. The test-retest approach was employed to ensure the study's reliability. The result indicated a reliability score of 0.82, guaranteeing the instrument's reliability. The data gathered for the study was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Technique was used to test the hypothesis at 95% level of confidence; giving a significant level of 0.05 with the aid with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Analysis and Results

### Analysis of Questionnaire

A total of one hundred and thirty- two (132) copies of the questionnaire were administered; out of which one hundred and fourteen (114) was retrieved; this gave rise to 86.4% response rate. A total of one hundred and eleven (111) was found to be valid for the analyses. This resulted in 84.1% valid response rate which was consequently used for analysis.

### Test of Hypotheses

### Hypothesis One

$H_01$:    *There is no significant relationship between perceived product quality and guests' purchase intention.*

**Correlations**

|  |  | Perceived Quality | Purchase Intention |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Quality | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .821[*] |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .001 |
|  | N | 111 | 111 |
| Purchase Intention | Pearson Correlation | .821[*] | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |  |
|  | N | 111 | 111 |

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

The result showed the correlation result for Hypothesis One. The result revealed that a strong, significant and positive relationship perceived quality and purchase intention. The correlation showed a statistic (P=0.821, p<0.005) which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the $(r^2)$ value of .67.4 indicates about 67.4% predictive capacity of perceived product quality on guests' purchase intention of Hotels in Port Harcourt; thus the null hypothesis is not upheld.

**Hypothesis Two**

$H_02$: *There is no significant relationship between price perception and guests' purchase intention.*

**Correlations**

| | | Price Perception | Purchase Intention |
|---|---|---|---|
| Price Perception | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .900[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .001 |
| | N | 111 | 111 |
| Purchase Intention | Pearson Correlation | .900[*] | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | |
| | N | 111 | 111 |

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

The result showed the correlation result for Hypothesis Two. The result revealed that a strong, significant and positive relationship perceived quality and purchase intention. The correlation showed a statistic (P=0.900, p<0.005) which indicates that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the ($r^2$) value of .81 indicates about 81% predictive capacity of price perception on guests' purchase intention of Hotels in Port Harcourt; thus the null hypothesis is not upheld.

**Hypothesis Three**

$H_03$: *There is no significant relationship between brand awareness and guests' purchase intention.*

**Correlations**

| | | Perceived Brand Awareness | Purchase Intention |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Brand Awareness | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .688[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .001 |
| | N | 111 | 111 |
| Purchase Intention | Pearson Correlation | .688[*] | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | |
| | N | 111 | 111 |

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

The result showed the correlation result for Hypothesis Three. The result revealed that a strong, significant and positive relationship perceived brand awareness and purchase intention. The correlation showed a statistic (P=0.688, p<0.005) which indicates that there is a strong, positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the ($r^2$) value of .473 indicates about 47.3% predictive capacity of perceived brand awareness on guests' purchase intention of Hotels in Port Harcourt; thus the null hypothesis is not upheld.

**Hypothesis Four**

**H₀4:**    *There is no significant relationship between brand image and guests' purchase intention.*

**Correlations**

| | | Perceived Brand Image | Purchase Intention |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Brand Image | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .972[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 111 | 111 |
| Purchase Intention | Pearson Correlation | .972[*] | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 111 | 111 |

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

The result showed the correlation result for Hypothesis Four. The result revealed that a strong, significant and positive relationship perceived brand image and purchase intention. The correlation showed a statistic (P=0.972, p<0.005) which indicate that there is a strong, positive and signicantrelationship between the two variables.  Furthermore, the ($r^2$) value of .945 indicates about 94.5% predictive capacity of perceived brand image on guests' purchase intention of Hotels in Port Harcourt; thus the null hypothesis is not upheld.

**Discussions**

This study sought to examine the relationship between brand perception and guests' purchase intention in hotels located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State Niger. Brand perception was operationalized with perceived product quality, price perception, brand awareness and brand image, resulting in the formulation of four research hypotheses which were subjected to statistical analysis. The results and findings are discussed hereunder.

This  first hypothesis investigated the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention of guests' in Port Harcourt hotels. The result revealed that a strong, positive and  significant relationship existed between perceived quality and purchase intention with a correlation value of .821 thus the null hypothesis is not upheld. This finding is in tandem with Nurul and Euis (2017)andAmron (2018). Muharam and Euis (2017) also stated thatquality of a product, brand image, and pricing perception all affected purchase choices considerably.

The second finding showed that price perception showed a very high correlation with guest' purchase intention with r value of .900; thus the null hypothesis was rejected. The results are in agreement with previous studies for instance Nurul and Euis (2017) discovered that pricing perception influences consumer purchase choices positively. Harwani and Pradita (2017) discovered that pricing perception affected purchase choices in their study. Muharam and Euis (2017) explained similar findings, namely that price perception positively influenced purchase choices. Similarly, (Brodie et al., 2009) found that pricing is a critical component of the marketing mix; according to Nurul and Euis (2017), one of the factors influencing purchase choices is the customer's pricing perceptions.

The third finding which showed that perceived brand awareness has a moderate positive relationship with purchase intention boasted of a correlation value r of .688. Though this result ranks low

compared to other dimensions of brand perception; possible explanation could be as a result of the fact that hotel managers in Port Harcourt (and Nigeria as a whole) are yet to take advantage of social media platforms to reaching the target market. However, According to Yasin et al (2007) maintained that when a brand is recognized and remembered, it is more likely to be chosen. It is well understood that brand awareness is vital for developing brand perception (Aaker, 2009; Keller, 1993; Macdonald, & Sharp, 2000).

The fourth finding of the study established that perceived brand image have a strong positive relationship with guests' purchase intention with a correlation value of .972. In fact the result further showed that r square value of .945 indicated that it possess a strong predictive capacity of 94.5% on purchase intention. This implies that a favourable perceived brand image will result in positive intention of guests to patronise the hotels in Port Harcourt. This agrees with the findings of Das (2015) who discovered a link between brand image-congruence and purchasing intent. Foster (2016) discovered that brand image had a beneficial effect on purchase choices. Similarly, Nurul and Euis (2017) discovered that perceived brand image had a beneficial influence on customer purchase choices and Amron (2018) discovered how brand image determined and influenced buying choices.

## Recommendations

It was therefore recommended that the management of hotels should strive to improve the image of their hotels by creating marketing strategies that will improve the perception of their target audience about the hotels. It is also imperative for hotel managers to take advantage of marketing through social media to create positive awareness and communication with the public. This will help boost their image and ultimately induce guests' patronage.

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