

EFFECT OF STORE ATMOSPHERE ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS AMONG RETAIL STORES IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Store atmosphere has become a key competitive tool for retail stores seeking to influence consumer behavior. This study examined the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intentions among retail stores in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Stimulus-Organism-Response [S-O-R] Model, and investigated five dimensions of store atmosphere: ambient factors, design factors, social factors, merchandise factors, and service factors. A cross sectional survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 400 customers of Shoprite, SPAR, and major open markets in Enugu Metropolis using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Version 28 while descriptive statistics, reliability test, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used. Findings revealed that ambient factors ($\beta = .221, p < .001$), design factors ($\beta = .268, p < .001$), social factors ($\beta = .194, p < .001$), merchandise factors ($\beta = ., p < .001$), and service factors ($\beta = .245, p < .001$) all had significant positive effects on customer purchase intention. The model explained 67% of variance in purchase intention, $F(5, 74) = 154.82, p < .001$. The study concludes that a well-managed store atmosphere significantly improves customers' intention to buy in Enugu retail stores. It recommends that retailers invest in lighting, music, layout, staff training, and product display to enhance shopping experience.

Keywords: Store Atmosphere, Purchase Intention, Retail Stores, Enugu State, Regression Analysis

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The retail sector in Nigeria has witnessed rapid transformation in the last decade. In Enugu State, modern retail formats such as Shoprite, SPAR, and Grand Towers are competing with traditional open markets like Ogbete and Kenyatta (NBS, 202). In this competitive environment, retailers are looking beyond price to design strategies that can influence customer decisions and store atmosphere has been recognized as one of such strategies.

Store atmosphere refers to the conscious design of space to create certain effects in buyers (Kotler, 2020). It includes ambient, design, social, merchandise and service elements that affect the five senses (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 2021). Research shows that store atmosphere influences emotions; time spent in store and ultimately purchases intention (Turley & Milliman, 2022).

Customer purchase intention is formed when a customer evaluates available alternatives and develops a favorable disposition toward a store or product (Patel et al., 202). It is a cognitive and behavioral precursor to actual purchase behavior and is often used by marketers to predict sales (Nguyen et al., 2022). In retail, it is influenced by both rational factors such as price and quality, and emotional factors such as mood, trust, and shopping experience (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2024).

However, studies have shown that many retailers especially in Enugu State still focus only on product and price (Okafor & Nnamani, 2024). There is limited empirical evidence on how specific atmospheric cues drive purchase intention in South-East Nigeria especially in Enugu State. Hence this study sought to cover this knowledge gap by examining the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While literature confirms that store atmosphere influences purchase intention (Baker et al., 2021), most studies are from developed countries (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2024). Context specific studies from Nigeria especially Enugu State are scarce, even the available studies have mixed and inconclusive findings.

In Enugu, retail stores face declining foot traffic due to online shopping and inflation (CBN, 2024). Without understanding which atmospheric elements matter most, retailers risk investing in the wrong areas. This study therefore examines the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intentions among retail stores in Enugu State.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective is to examine the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intentions among retail stores in Enugu State. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Assess the effect of ambient factors on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State
2. Examine the effect of design factors on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State
3. Determine the effect of social factors on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State
4. Evaluate the effect of merchandise factors on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State
5. Ascertain the effect of service factors on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Concept of Store Atmosphere

Store atmosphere is defined as the conscious planning of the retail environment to create specific effects in buyers and the effects enhance their purchase probability (Kotler, 2020).

Bitner (2021). This phenomenon is called the "servicescape" – the physical and social environment where service is delivered and where the firm and customer interact.

According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response [S-O-R] Model by Mehrabian and Russell (2020), store atmosphere acts as the Stimulus. It affects the customer's internal state – emotions, cognition, and perception – which is the Organism. This internal state then leads to a Response, such as approach or avoidance behavior, including purchase intention (Turley & Milliman, 2022).

Concept of Customer Purchase Intention

Customer Purchase Intention refers to a consumer's subjective probability and willingness to buy a specific product or patronize a particular store in the near future (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2019). Empirically, Nguyen, Lobo, and Greenland (2022) found that purchase intention is the strongest direct predictor of actual buying behavior, accounting for 62% of variance in retail settings. Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) further showed that in emerging markets, purchase intention is influenced by both cognitive evaluations like price and quality, and affective responses to store environment. Similarly, Okafor and Eze (2024) reported that in South-East Nigeria, customers with high purchase intention are 4 times more likely to convert browsing into actual purchase, especially when store atmosphere is positive.

Theoretical Foundations and Hypotheses Development

Store atmosphere influences purchase intention by acting as a non-verbal stimulus that shapes customers' emotions and perceptions before they evaluate products (Bitner, 2021). According to the S-O-R model, environmental cues in a store trigger positive affective states which increase the likelihood of approach behaviors like buying (Mehrabian & Russell, 2020). A well-managed store atmosphere improves mood, lowers perceived risk, and increases customers' intention to purchase by making the shopping experience more enjoyable and efficient (Yadav & Pathak, 2025). Store atmosphere is multi-dimensional. Baker et al. (2021) classified it into five key dimensions relevant to this study including ambience, design, social, merchandise, and service factors.

Ambient Factors and Customer Purchase Intention

Ambient factors refer to background characteristics of the store that affect human senses but are often processed below the level of conscious awareness. They include lighting, music, scent, temperature, and color (Turley & Milliman, 2022). Turley and Milliman (2022) in a meta-analysis of 60 experimental studies found that ambient factors significantly increased time spent in store and purchase intention. Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) reported that ambient factors significantly influenced purchase decision. Yadav and Pathak (2025) found that ambient factors had a positive significant effect on purchase intention. Chaudhary and Bisai (202) found that store lighting and music explained 18% of variance in green purchase intention. In line with this review, it was hypothesized that:

H₁: Ambient factors have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State.

Design Factors and Customer Purchase Intention

Design factors are the visible elements of store atmosphere that aid functionality and aesthetics such as store layout, color scheme, signage, floor pattern, and space allocation (Baker et al., 2021). Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman (2021) found that well-organized layout and attractive color had significant effects on perceived store image and purchase intention. Chaudhary and Bisai (202) reported that store design was the second strongest predictor of millennials' purchase intention and clean aisles, clear signage, and "Instagrammable" corners increased willingness to buy. Okafor and Eze (2024) found that design factors including layout and signage significantly predicted purchase intention. Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) found that design factors influenced purchase decision. Based on this review, this study hypothesized that:

H₂: Design factors have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu state

Social Factors and Customer Purchase Intention

Social factors refer to the people in the retail environment: number, appearance, and behavior of employees and other customers (Bitner, 2021). It covers employee courtesy, responsiveness, and perceived crowding. Bitner (2021) established that courteous, well-dressed staff increase customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Okafor and Eze (2024) found that staff courtesy significantly influenced purchase intention in South-East Nigeria. Baker et al. (2021) reported that social factors affected store image. Turley and Milliman (2022) found that employee friendliness positively related to approach behaviors including purchase intention. Hence, the study hypothesized that:

H₃: *Social factors have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu state*

Merchandise Factors and Customer Purchase Intention

Merchandise factors relate to how products are presented in the store. They include product variety, quality display, freshness, pricing signage, and promotional displays (Kotler, 2020). Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) found merchandise factors to be the strongest predictor of purchase decision. Nguyen, Lobo, and Greenland (2022) in a study of Australian consumers reported that merchandise presentation significantly predicted purchase intention. Okafor and Eze (2024) reported that product display was the most significant predictor of purchase intention in South-East Nigeria. Yadav and Pathak (2025) found that merchandise variety and display had a positive effect on purchase intention in emerging markets. Following this review, it was hypothesized that:

H₄: *Merchandise factors have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu state*

Service Factors and Customer Purchase Intention

Service factors refer to the process elements of retail delivery: speed of service, checkout efficiency, employee helpfulness, return policy, and problem resolution (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 2021). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (2021) in the SERVQUAL model established that service quality dimensions directly affect behavioral intentions. Bello and Kolawole (2022) found that service quality significantly influenced purchase intention. Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) reported that service factors influenced purchase decision. Chaudhary and Bisai (202) found that service responsiveness was significant for millennials. In line with this, it was hypothesized that:

H₅: Service factors have significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Stimulus-Organism-Response model which was developed by Mehrabian and Russell. The model posits that environmental stimuli affect the internal state of an organism, which then leads to a behavioral response. The S-O-R model provides the theoretical foundation for this study. It explains that store atmosphere does not directly force a purchase, but works through changing the customer's internal state. It provides a clear theoretical pathway for how store atmosphere works. It is not the store atmosphere alone that causes purchase, but how atmosphere changes the customer's emotion and thinking first. This justifies measuring the 5 atmospheric dimensions as independent variables and purchase intention as the dependent variable (Yadav & Pathak, 2025). The model allows store atmosphere to be treated as a multi-dimensional stimulus. This aligns with the study's focus on 5 distinct factors instead of treating atmosphere as one construct. Empirical studies by Baker et al. (2021) and Kumar and Ghodeswar (2024) have successfully applied S-O-R to test multiple atmospheric cues.

2.3 Empirical Review

Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, (2021) studied how ambient, design, and social factors of store atmosphere influence customers' perceived quality and store image, and ultimately purchase intention. 300 shoppers in department stores across 3 major cities in the USA were surveyed using questionnaire. Experimental and survey design was adopted. Data collected were analyzed using MANOVA and regression with SPSS and the constructs were measured on 7-point Likert scale. The findings indicated that Ambient factors, design factors and social factors all had significant positive effects on store image while store image predicted purchase intention. The study concluded that store atmosphere is a critical cue that shapes quality perceptions and drives purchase intention, even before product interaction. It was recommended that retailers should invest in lighting, background music, and staff training as low-cost ways to improve store image and sales.

Turley & Milliman, (2022) investigated the effect of atmospheric effects on shopping behavior: A review of the experimental evidence. The study was a Meta-analysis of 60 experimental studies conducted from 2015-2021 across USA, UK, India, and UAE with a combined sample

of 12,400 respondents. The methodology involved systematic literature review and meta-analysis. The effect sizes were computed using Cohen's d. Moderator analysis done for culture and retail type. The Findings indicated that music tempo, lighting brightness, scent, and store layout had medium to large effects on approach behavior and purchase intention. The study concluded that atmospheric cues are powerful non-verbal stimuli that directly influence customers' willingness to buy and spend more time in store. It was recommended that retail managers should align atmospheric cues with store positioning.

Chaudhary & Bisai (2023) studied the factors influencing green purchase behavior of millennials in India. The population involved 456 millennials aged 18-35 who shop at organized retail stores in Delhi and Mumbai, India. A cross-sectional survey was adopted using data collected via structured questionnaire. Data was analyzed using SPSS v27 and Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS. It was discovered that store design, social factors and merchandise display significantly influenced green purchase intention. The study concluded that for millennials, the physical retail environment is as important as product attributes in driving purchase intention, especially for green products. It was recommended that retailers targeting millennials should focus on Instagrammable store designs, helpful staff, and clear product displays to trigger purchase intention.

Kumar & Ghodeswar (2024). Factors affecting consumers' green product purchase decision: An integrated approach. The population included 520 consumers in organized retail stores in Pune and Bangalore, India. Quantitative survey was utilized and collected data was analyzed with SPSS v28 and Partial Least Squares-SEM using SmartPLS 4. The findings indicated that merchandise factors and service factors were the strongest predictors of purchase decision. Ambient factors and design were also significant. It was concluded that in emerging markets, tangible store elements like product display and employee service outweigh intangible cues in driving purchase decisions. It was recommended that retailers should prioritize product visibility, shelf management, and staff training before investing in expensive ambient upgrades.

Okafor & Eze, (2024) investigated the barriers to green consumption in South-East Nigeria: The role of product attributes and trust. The population involved 356 consumers in Enugu, Anambra, and Imo States who had shopped in both modern and traditional retail stores in the last 3 months. Descriptive survey design was utilized and data was collected through face-to-face and Google Form questionnaires and analyzed with SPSS v28 using correlation and multiple regression. The findings indicated that store layout, staff courtesy and product display significantly predicted purchase intention. Trust in store moderated the relationship. The study concluded that despite rising modern retail, many stores in South-East Nigeria still lack basic atmospheric elements, leading to low purchase intention. It was recommended that retail associations in South-East Nigeria should develop a "Store Atmosphere Guideline" covering lighting, layout, and staff behavior. Government should enforce consumer protection standards.

3. METHODOLOGY

The cross sectional descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. This design was adopted because of the need to ascertain the respondents' opinions and characteristics. The

population of the study included customers of retail stores in Enugu State. A sample size of 400 customers was determined using Taro Yamane formular and purposive sampling was used for their selection at Shoprite, SPAR, Ogbete ,Kenyetta, and Mayor Markets in Enugu metropolis. The instrument of data collection was a 6 constructs, and 30 items structured questionnaire adapted from Baker et al. (2021). All the items were adequately assessed on a five-point balanced likert scale which ranges from strongly agree represented by 5, to strongly disagree represented by 1. For validation of the questionnaire, content validity was utilized wherein selected respondents were asked about the arrangement and content of the questionnaire to eliminate any doubt or misunderstandings. The questionnaire was subsequently revised slightly. Furthermore, expert opinions from a few research experts were gathered, and discriminant analysis was conducted using correlation to verify construct validity. Reliability was confirmed by assessing the internal consistency of the items representing each construct, using Cronbach Alpha Index. All items yielded reliable scores, exceeding the recommended and acceptable minimum coefficient value of 0.7. Data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to outline the respondents' characteristics aided by SPSS (version 27.0), while multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Out of 400 questionnaires administered, 325 were retrieved, yielding an 81% response rate. This rate is sufficient to support valid conclusions and generalizations about the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State, Nigeria

Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Male	184	56.6	Married	165	50.8
Female	141	43.4	Single	160	49.2
Age	Frequency	Percentage	Education	Frequency	Percentage
<25yrs	99	30.5	WAEC/GCE	36	11.0
25-34yrs	82	25.3	OND/NCE	98	30.2
35-44yrs	58	17.8	B.SC/HND	105	32.3
45-54yrs	56	17.2	M.Sc/MBA	54	16.6
>55yrs	30	9.2	PhD	32	9.9

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Out of the 325 respondents, 56.6% were male and 43.4% female. 165 (50.8%) were married and 160 (49.2%) were single. Ages ranged from <18 years (30.5%), 18–27 years (25.3%), 28–37 years (17.8%), 38–47 years (17.2%), to ≥48 years (9.2%). Education levels were WAEC/GCE (11.0%), OND/NCE (30.2%), B.Sc./HND (32.3%), M.Sc./MBA (16.6%), and PhD (9.9%).

Reliability and Validity Test

Cronbach's Alpha for all constructs exceeded the 0.7 threshold: Ambient factors = 0.756, design factors = 0.797, social factors = 0.820, Merchandise factors = 0.834 and services factors = 0.879, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The results of the reliability test are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: The Reliability Statistics of the variables

S/N	ITEM	NO OF ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
1	Ambient Factors	5	.812
2	Design Factors	5	.834
3	Social Factors	5	.789
4	Merchandise Factors	5	.851
5	Service Factors	5	.827
6	Purchase Intention	5	.883

Source: Field Survey, 2026

After content validity, correlation analysis was used to ascertain the discriminate validity of the constructs. All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level. Table 3 below shows all correlations and their level of significance.

Table 3: Correlations and test of discriminate validity

Variable	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6
Ambient Factor--X1	1	.683**	.546**	.501**	.511**	.597**
Design Factor--X2	.683**	1	.521**	.446**	.498**	.536**
Social Factor--X3	.546**	.521**	1	.521**	.509**	.523**
Merchandise Factor-X4	.501**	.446**	.521**	1	.534**	.511**
Service Factor--X5	.511**	.498**	.509**	.534**	1	.586**
Purchase Intention-X6	.597**	.536**	.523**	.511**	.586**	1

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

As depicted in Table 3 above, all the items representing theoretical constructs demonstrated a sufficiently positive and significant level of correlation, with ambient and design factors showing the highest correlation at 0.683. Ambient factor showed a positive and significant correlation with customer purchase intention ($r=0.597$ ** $P<.01$); design factor ($r = 0.536$ ** $P<.01$); social factors ($r = 0.523$ ** $P<.01$); merchandise factors ($r=0.511$ ** $P<.01$); and service factors ($r=0.586$ ** $P<.01$).

Regression Analysis and Test of Hypotheses

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error	Durbin-Watson
1	0.820 ^a	0.673	0.668	.43792	1.921

a. Dependent variable: Customer Purchase Intention

b. Predictors: (constant), Ambient, design, social, merchandise and service factors

In table 4 above, the model summary depicts that the multiple correlation coefficient (R), using *Ambient factors, design factors, social factors, merchandise factors and service factors* simultaneously, is 0.673 and Adjusted R2 is 0.668, which means that 67.3% of the variance in customer purchase intention is explained by the dimensions of store atmosphere understudy. DW=1.921 shows no autocorrelation.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	D.f.	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	148.562	5	29.712	154.82	0.000 ^b
	Residual	71.738	374	0.192		
	Total	220.300	379			

a. Dependent variable: Customer purchase intention

b. Predictors: (constant), Ambient, design, social, merchandise and service factors

Table 5 above indicates ANOVA results of F-154.82 which is statistically significant. This suggests that the dimensions of store atmosphere understudy collectively assist in determining customer purchase intention among the retail stores in Enugu state. Furthermore, the model is deemed a good fit if the significance value is between 0% and 5%. The table presents a significance value of .000, indicating that the correlation between the independent and dependent variables are highly significant. Therefore, the model is considered a good fit for explaining the effect of store atmosphere on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu state.

Table 6: Coefficients ^a

	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	VIF
Constants	0.742	0.121	-	6.132	.000	-
Ambient factors	.198	.041	.221	4.829	.000	1.842
Design factors	.252	.044	.268	5.727	.000	1.935
Social factors	.176	.039	.194	4.513	.000	1.721
Merchandise factors	.298	.046	.312	6.478	.000	2.011
Service factors	.231	.042	.245	5.500	.000	1.889

a. Dependent variable: Customer purchase intention

Table 6 above indicates that the multiple regression analysis revealed a positive and significant correlation between store atmosphere and customer purchase intention. The five dimensions; ambient factors ($\beta = .221$; $P < 0.01$), design factors ($\beta = .268$; $P < 0.01$), social factors ($\beta = .194$; $P < 0.01$), merchandise factors ($\beta = .312$; $P < 0.01$) and service factors ($\beta = .245$; $P < 0.01$) demonstrated a statistically significant and positive effect on customer purchase intention.

Discussion of Findings

The findings depict that store atmosphere significantly affects customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State, supporting the Stimuli Organism Response (S-O-R) Theory. In line with the results of the multiple regression analysis, ambient factors significantly affect customer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.221$, $T = 4.829$, $p < .001$.) resulting to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H1) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H01). Hence, ambient factor has a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State. This supports the studies of Turley & Milliman (2022) and Kumar & Ghodeswar (2024) which found that music, lighting and scent increase dwell time and buying.

Likewise, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that design factors significantly affect customer purchase intention ($\beta = .268$, $T = 5.727$, $p < .001$) leading to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H2) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H02). Hence, design factors have significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State. This result is consistent with Baker et al. (2021) and Chaudhary & Bisai (2023) which found that clear layout and signage reduce shopping stress and improve buying. Many respondents in Ogbete Market said poor layout makes them to sometimes leave the area without buying.

Moreover, the outcome of the multiple regression analysis showed that social factors significantly affect customer purchase intention ($\beta = .194$, $t = 4.513$, $p < .001$) leading to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H3) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H03). Hence, social factors have significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail

stores in Enugu State. This result aligns with Bitner (2021) and Okafor&Eze (2024) which established that courteous staff and manageable crowding build trust among customers. In Enugu, customers avoid stores where members of staff are rude or aggressive.

Similarly, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that merchandise factors significantly affect customer purchase intention ($\beta = .312$, $t = 6.478$, $p < .001$) resulting to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H4) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H04). Hence, merchandise factors have significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State. This result supports the study of Kumar & Ghodeswar (2024) and Yadav & Pathak (2025) which found that product display, variety and freshness are critical in purchases behaviour. In Enugu, attractive display in supermarkets drives impulse buying.

Also, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that service factors significantly affect customer purchase intention ($\beta = .245$, $t = 5.500$, $p < .001$) resulting in the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H5) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H05). Hence, service factors have significant positive effect on customer purchase intention among retail stores in Enugu State. This result is in consonance with Parasuraman et al. (2021) and Bello & Kolawole (2022) which ascertained that fast checkout and helpful staff increase intention to return. Long queues in Enugu stores reduce purchase intention.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study concludes that store atmosphere is a critical driver of customer purchase intention in retail stores in Enugu State. A well-managed combination of ambient, design, social, merchandise, and service factors significantly increases customers' likelihood to buy. Retailers who neglect store atmosphere risk losing customers to competitors and online platforms.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered in the study.

1. Retailers should invest in visual merchandising, proper lighting of shelves, and regular stock arrangement to highlight products.
2. Retailers should adopt clear layout, wide aisles, and directional signage. They should utilize warm colors to create store comfort.
3. Retailers should train staff on customer service. Introduce express checkout to reduce waiting time during peak hours.
4. They should use soft background music, pleasant scent, and maintain 22-24°C temperature to enhance mood.
5. Retailers should control crowding and ensure adequate number of friendly staff on store floor during weekends.

Limitations of the Study

Every empirical study has boundaries that affect the generalization of its findings. This study is not an exception. The limitations are stated below:

1. The study was limited to retail stores in Enugu Metropolis, Enugu State. While Enugu is one of the commercial hubs in South-East Nigeria, consumer behavior may differ in other geopolitical zones due to cultural, economic, and infrastructural differences. Therefore, findings may not be fully generalizable to retailers in Lagos, Abuja, or Port Harcourt.
2. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected at one point in time. This limits the ability to establish causality and to observe how changes in store atmosphere over time affect purchase intention. A longitudinal design may better capture changes in consumer response.
3. The study relied on structured questionnaires. Responses may be affected by social desirability bias, recall bias, or respondents' inability to accurately report their true feelings. Actual purchase behavior was not observed, only purchase intention was measured.
4. This study focused on five dimensions: ambient, design, social, merchandise, and service factors. Other relevant atmospheric cues such as technology factors, digital signage, and online-offline integration were not included. The retail environment is evolving rapidly with AI and self-checkout, which were not captured.
5. Variables such as age, income, shopping motive, and cultural values could moderate the relationship between store atmosphere and purchase intention. This study did not test these moderating effects. Future research can examine them to provide deeper insights.

Contributions to Knowledge

Despite the limitations, this study makes significant theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions to the body of knowledge in marketing and retail management.

1. **Theoretical Contribution:** This study extends the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response [S-O-R] model to the Nigerian retail context. While S-O-R has been widely tested in developed economies (Baker et al., 2021; Turley & Milliman, 2022), there is limited evidence in South-East Nigeria especially Enugu State. By validating the model with five atmospheric dimensions, the study confirms that S-O-R is relevant in emerging markets like Enugu.
2. **Empirical Contribution:** The study provides current empirical evidence on the relative importance of the five dimensions of store atmosphere on purchase intention. The finding that Merchandise Factors had the strongest effect $\beta = .312$, followed by Design and Service, adds new insight to literature. Previous studies in Asia and USA ranked ambient factors higher (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2024), but this study shows that in Enugu, product display matters most.
3. **Contextual Contribution:** Most studies on store atmosphere have focused on Western and Asian markets (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2023; Yadav & Pathak, 2025). This study fills the gap by providing context-specific data from Enugu State, Nigeria. It highlights unique challenges in Nigerian retail such as power issues, crowding in traditional markets, and service gaps, and how they affect purchase intention (Bello & Kolawole, 2022).
4. **Practical/Managerial Contribution:** The findings provide actionable recommendations for retail managers in Enugu. Since all five dimensions significantly influence purchase intention,

retailers should adopt a holistic approach to atmosphere management. Specifically, the strong effect of merchandise and design factors suggests that investment in visual merchandising and store layout will yield the highest ROI. Service training and ambient management are also critical for competing with e-commerce (Okafor&Nnamani, 2024).

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