

## INFLUENCE OF FURNISHING IN DRIVING UP CONSUMER BASED BRAND EQUITY IN HOTEL OPERATIONS IN UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE.

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of furnishing in driving up consumer based brand equity in hotel operations in Umuahia, Abia State. It was a survey research and four research hypotheses guided the study. The study population included consumers of goods and services of registered hotels in Umuahia metropolis. It was an infinite population and the sample size was determined using Cochran (1977) formular, which gave 246. Data was generated using structured questionnaire on a four-point scale, and was analysed by running regression analysis on SPSS version 25. Findings revealed that furnishing has positive and significant influence on consumer based brand equity in hotel operations in the study area. It was concluded based on the findings that furnishing can drive up consumer based brand equity in hotel operations. The researchers recommended among others that managers should install attractive and customer-oriented furnishing to improve the level of awareness and differentiate a brand from others, while customers' comfort and safety should be a top consideration when furnishing to build brand association.*

*Key words: Furnishing, Consumer, Brand Equity, Hotel Operations.*

### **Introduction**

#### **Background to the Study**

Understanding the consumer is crucial to success in hospitality business. Consumer motivation has often been scrutinized in terms of consumer decision making, satisfaction, experiences, environment and interactions with others. Scholars in the service industry maintain that all decisions about management of the hotel should begin with understanding the consumer/guest and profiling consumer/guest needs. It is only when consumer needs are either met or surpassed that the quality of a hotel's service offerings can be said to have met consumer expectations which ultimately leads to customer satisfaction. Satisfaction

is understood to be predicted by service quality (Sudin, 2011). Therefore, delivering high quality service is important for the success of hotel organizations so that they can survive and strengthen their competitiveness. Hotels are not insulated from either increased competition or customer demand for high and improved service quality. Nowadays, consumers have a wide range of hotels to choose from and service quality conditions indeed might influence consumer choice as well as a hotel's competitive advantage. Service quality has become an important factor for organizations and studies related to it have been growing particularly in the service sector.

Researchers argue that service quality cuts across all operations of any service organization and has components or dimensions; reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, empathy, and assurance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988). Of these components, furnishing relates more to tangibles. Furnishing is the style of decoration used in hospitality industry, and it is seen as a framework through which the prospective guests view the hospitality industry (Su, 2016). It is an integral component of tangibles dimension of service quality that promotes customer based brand equity. Every customer will always want to go to a hotel where the environment is not only conducive, but cosy, with good rooms that will make them feel at home (Goeldner, Washburn and Plank, 2009). While service quality and satisfaction are important throughout the hotel industry, they are nowhere more important than in luxury properties, where guests expect high quality of service (Dubois, Donthu, and Lee, 2008).

Effective hotel furnishing needs to find a balance between operational functionality (ease-of-use, economics, and safety requirements, for example) and the physical environmental elements (such as hotel furniture, fixtures, equipment, plants and art) to create the required ambience for guests. By understanding and meeting the requirements of these two approaches, the hotel's furnishing will be based on a firm, long-term operational and functional footing ( Ekiz, Del Río, and Iglesias, 2012). Hotel operators must concentrate on the quality of every detail of service encountered by their guests (Su, 2016). Hotel operations are performance of a practical work or of something involving the practical application of principles or processes and

transformation of resources or data inputs into desired goods, services, or results, capable of creating value to the customers (Sasmita, and MohdSuki, 2015).

In any residential establishment, the basic requirements for guest are food, drink and accommodation. The statement "that first impression last longer" is very true as the guest from his/her impression on entering the facility will decide if he/she will repeat the visit. In the past, it was true that the room of a hotel should as far as possible give appearance of home away from home. But it is now realised that the guest who wants to feel at home expects so much difference in the way of decoration (Tuan, 2014).

Nowadays new architectural designs and furnishings have been formulated to give the facility a warm, friendly and luxury appearance. The role of Furnishing in hospitality cannot be underestimated as warm, colour, good furniture among others attract guests to hospitality organizations. If a customer chooses a hotel facility over other competing hotels on account of quality of furnishing, it then follows that the choice hotel has brand equity over the rest by the customer's estimation. This makes it necessary for the hospitality industry to pay strict attention to furnishing (Venkatesan, Farris, Guissoni, and Neves, 2015).

Consumer-based brand equity is seen as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. A brand is said to have positive customer-based brand equity when consumers react more favourably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is identified than when it is not (Wong, 2011)

Good furnishing makes customers to choose a particular brand over another. When a hotel is well furnished, it increases

the brand equity of customers. Customers will always prefer to patronize the hotel whose environment and rooms are well furnished because it makes way for relaxation and comfort (Ryan, Sacha, and Clay, 2013).

Consumer based brand equity as a construct, has featured permanently in marketing literature for decades now, as a lot of studies have been dedicated to it (Wong, 2011; Ryan et al, 2013; Venkatesen, et al., 2015). While majority of such studies had focused on banking, health care, education, communication, and insurance, only a handful has been carried out in hospitality sector. However, in the course of literature search for this present study, it was observed that there has never been any study in hospitality operations that investigated the direct relationship between furnishing and consumer-based brand equity, particularly in the Nigerian context. Therefore, there is dearth of empirical evidence in this area of study in Nigeria and thus the need for the present study since it is possible that research findings obtained in developed climes may not apply in a developing country such as Nigeria due to perhaps environmental peculiarities and the socio-economic characteristics of the people.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine the influence of furnishing in driving up consumer based brand equity in hotel operation in Umuahia. The specific objectives sought to determine:

- i. influence of furnishing on brand awareness in hotel operation
- ii. effect of furnishing on brand association in hotel operation
- iii. the extent to which furnishing can influence perceived quality in hotel operation
- iv. influence of furnishing on brand loyalty in hotel operation

### Research Hypotheses

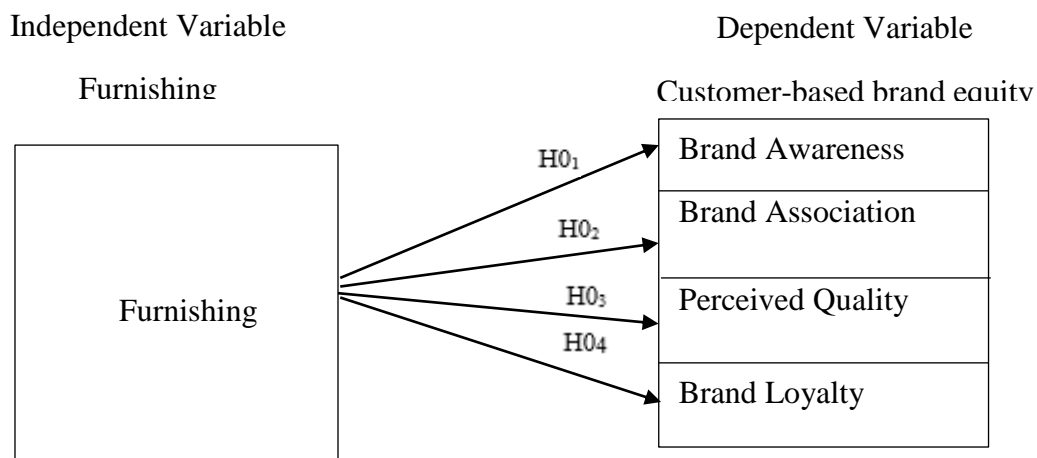
The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand awareness in hotel operation

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand association in hotel operation

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no positive relationship between furnishing and perceived quality in hotel operation.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no positive relationship between furnishing and brand loyalty in hotel operation.



**Fig. 1.1 Research Model.****Source: Researcher's Desk, 2019.****Review of Related Literature****Concept of Furnishing**

Furnishing is the act of supplying (a house, room, etc.) with necessary furniture, appliances, fittings, and other decorative accessories such as curtains and carpets, etc. that tend to increase comfort or utility (Shanka, 2012). According Wikipedia the free encyclopaedia, furnishing may include some furniture type (the movable articles in a room or in an establishment that make it fit for living or working.

A hotel room is ideally a home away from home, a space that should be comfortable and functional, while providing a special experience and escape from everyday life. But while this basic concept of hotel rooms has not changed much over the years, hotel design and furnishings are greatly evolving. US-based firm specializing in hospitality furniture solutions, provides customized furnishing and design solutions to their clients (Marcus, 2011). Furnishings turn the neutral spaces into personal and very special places. Fabric is the prime contributor in home furnishing products and thus it must provide the texture, colour, character, scale and anything that is missing in the architecture. Fabric has many roles to play, it brings style, reflects one's taste and controls the mood. Moreover, it is the most flexible and can be easily changed, replaced or added to. Fabrics increase liveability and workability of a small place, reduce noises, make music and even speech richer and more resonant. Some benefits of furnishing includes:

- (a) people can immediately see the potential of a hotel – rooms become bedrooms, kitchens look homely –

and that helps them make the decision quickly;

- (b) it sets the hotel apart from the rest – quality, stylish furniture and the latest appliances can give a hotel a competitive edge;
- (c) it is ideal for quick lets – people can sign up and move straight in because the hotel has everything they need;
- (d) It can also act as a benchmark for the levels of service, quality and comfort that a guest expects.

Therefore, good quality hotel furnishing is more important than ever before. There are clear financial benefits for hotel organizations that implement effective furnishing, as an enormous investment will go into creating an environment that both customers and staff will feel comfortable in; furnishing can add a certain dignity and charm to any room, whether it be lighter-coloured furnishing or rich darker hues. Furnishing can also go a long way to creating a sense of the natural world indoors. Furnishing e.g. wood furniture can also immediately bring warmth to otherwise sterile surroundings; furnishing ensures confidence and a peace of mind found nowhere else in the industry; and furnishing enhances the operation of the hotel and enhances customer satisfaction.

Geronikolas (2012) reports that the five factors in the hotel industry that are most likely to drive customers away include untrained and perceived rude staff; lack of cleanliness around the premises, in hotel rooms or within its restaurants; the guests right, affordability, and value for money.

**Consumer-based brand equity**

Generally, academicians have taken two distinct perspectives and principal to study brand equity concept – consumer based approach and financial approach. The financial perspective of brand equity is concerned with the asset value of the evaluated brand (Keller, 2009; Aaker, 2012). The consumer based perspective however is basically the evaluation of customer's responses towards a particular brand (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). According to Aaker (1991), consumer-based brand equity can be defined as the value customers associate themselves with concerning a brand using a set of dimensions such as brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty. Consumer-based brand equity has been defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Kamakura and Russell, 2010). Thus brand equity is conceptualized from the perspective of the individual consumer and consumer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in the memory (Kamakura and Russell, 2010).

Based on this definition, we believe that there are five important considerations to defining brand equity. First, brand equity refers to consumer perceptions rather than any objective indicators. Second, brand equity refers to a global value associated with a brand. Third, the global value associated with the brand stems from the brand name and not only from physical aspects of the brand. Fourth, brand equity is not absolute but relative to competition. Finally, brand equity positively influences financial performance. In view of these characteristics, we operationalize brand equity as “the enhancement in the

perceived utility and desirability a brand name confers on a product”. It is the consumers' perception of the overall superiority of a product carrying that brand name when compared to other brands.

Sudin (2011) has stated that elements such as customer's familiarity, knowledge and associations towards a specific brand define the essentials of consumer-based brand equity theory. Strong brands have greater tendency in increasing the trust level among consumers for intangible products by helping customers to visualize better and form greater understanding in making informed decisions. This can significantly reduce customers' perceived risks particularly monetary, safety and social risks in making a purchase decision in which evaluation process with the availability of vast brand choices could be a great challenge. In this regard, it was found that high level of brand equity could ultimately increase the degree of customers' satisfaction, repeat purchase intention and brand loyalty towards product/services (Keller, 2009).

The brand equity is a value that is created by increasing the effectiveness of marketing activities, creating a higher degree of brand preference, the desired purchase intent and increase in the market share of a firm, (Aaker, 2012). Sasmita and MohdSuki (2015) see the consumer-based brand equity as the recognition of the brand impact relating to the consumer on the consumer's reaction towards the company's compound marketing strategy. According to (Ekiz, et al, 2012), consumer-based brand equity serves as the most important parameter in determining customer's purchase decision and also an important instrument for associating a brand and influencing

customer's purchase decisions for a particular hotel.

### **Dimensions of Consumer-based brand equity**

The brand equity model developed by Aaker (1991; 2012) was adopted in this study and the four dimensions are presented as follows: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

#### **Brand awareness**

Aaker (2012) defined brand awareness as the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or remember that a brand is a member of a particular commodity class. Awareness is seen as the ability of the customer to recognise a brand and the goods and services related to the brand. Throughout all the researches done on brand equity concept, brand awareness is undoubtedly one of the key dimensions specified in most of the studies on brand equity Dubois, et al, (2008). Brand awareness could be described as the customers' ability to identify, recognize and recall a particular brand under various circumstances by associating the brand, image, symbol, logo and other elements into memory (Keller, 2009). In contrast, Aaker (1991) has stated that criteria such as brand knowledge, brand dominance, top of mind and brand opinion are the essence of forming brand awareness in consumers' mind. The level of noticeability and awareness a brand can achieve in the marketplace will influence its brand equity.

Therefore, if a brand can attain higher level of awareness, the likelihood of the products related to that brand being purchased is high as well. Brand awareness is very important in influencing customer's buying decisions as they are generally driven by heuristic elements like "choose the brand

they know" or buy the brand they have heard of" which subsequently leads to purchasing well established brands (Keller, 2009). Anyanwu (2019) maintains that the type and quality of material markers, features, and decorations distinguish a brand from others and thus create awareness about a brand and its offerings.

#### **Brand association**

According to Aaker (1991; 2012), brand associations consist of anything in memory that is related to brand. Consistent and brand association may be observed as the forms and characteristics related to a product or to the independent aspects of a commodity itself that stays in customer's memory. Keller (2009) has stated that three major aspects could be derived from the dimension of brand associations specifically under brand image which are the benefits, attributes and attitudes Generally, brand image is formed by a set of associations that are usually developed and organized in a very peculiar way that help provide meaning and value to both firm and customers (Chang and Horng 2010; Sadia, Tasneem, and Muhammad, 2013). Besides helping to create a positive feeling, brand association also plays an important role in helping customers to process or retrieve information, identify brand differentiation and provide reasons to make purchase. A brand can differentiate itself from other brands through various means including furnishing. This can lead to the development of some form of brand association in the minds of customers.

#### **Perceived quality**

Perceived quality is defined as customers' judgment towards the advantage, superiority, credit and the difference of a brand compared to other rival brands. It could also be categorized as

an element of yet another brand equity dimension – brand associations in which components such as brand attitude, brand image and perceived quality can form as multi-dimensions proposition (Nasution and Mavondo, 2005; Sudin, 2011). According to Aaker (1991), customer's overall perception and evaluation of a specific product's level of quality in connection with its intended objective relative to availability of alternatives can best describe the term perceived quality.

Therefore, the dimension of perceived quality could have some conceptualization differences in terms of manufacturing quality, product based quality or the objective quality (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality can generate value particularly in the context of price premium, reason to buy, differentiation position, and brand extension and channel member interest. A study by Anyanwu (2019) revealed that tangibles dimension (material markers, features, decorations, furnishing, among others) of service quality enhances the perception of service quality. According to the researcher, tangibles dimension helps in tangibilizing the intangibility characteristics of service.

### **Brand loyalty**

Aaker (1991), saw brand loyalty as a situation that indicates how likely a consumer will change a brand, especially when that brand causes a change in its price or features. Loyalty is defined as a behavioural response as well as a physiological function. Brand loyalty is a descriptive variable that reflects the unique differences of behaviours and purchase style of customer in a specific product class.

Over the years, brand loyalty has been studied extensively by researchers and marketers which have enriched the

marketing literature (Bailey and Ball, 2012). Generally, customers have high tendency to be attracted to new brands in the markets and would like to try them out however, there is no indication that they will continue to stick with that brand in the future. In order to make customers stick with that particular brand as their preferred choice, brand loyalty has to play its role. Oliver (1999) has defined the term brand loyalty as a continuous commitment to repurchase or revisit a particular product or service in a very consistent manner, thereby leading to repetitive purchase of the same preferred brand despite various marketing efforts by competing firms and other situational factors that could potentially cause a change in attitude and switching behaviour. According to Sadia, Tasneem, and Muhammad (2013), customers will only consider themselves to be loyal to certain brands if they could associate positively with that brand. This follows that continuous improvement in all operations of a hotel has far reaching positive effects on how its service quality is perceived by customers in terms of meeting or surpassing their expectations, and this ultimately influences customer loyalty.

This present study is anchored on the theory of colour, which is the real basis for the colour wheel rooted in Newton's experiments with prisms. The researcher's experiment led to the theory that red, yellow, and blue are primary colours from which other colours are derived ([https://munsell.com](https://munsell.com;).; <https://en.wikipedia.org>). Colours are often used to trigger sensory reactions and emotions, and to prompt consumers to make assessments about brands. Prudent use of colours can contribute not only to differentiating products from competitors, but also to influencing moods and feelings –

positively or negatively – and therefore, in forming attitude towards certain products. Given that our moods and feelings are unstable and that colours play roles in forming attitude, it is important that managers understand the importance of colours in their daily business operation. Scholars argue that our habits prefer instantly recognizable brands, which makes colour incredibly important when creating a brand identity.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study was a survey research which involves using a sample from the population and was carried out in Umuahia, Abia State. Umuahia is the capital of Abia State and has reasonable number of registered hotels. The city is located along the rail road that lies between Port Harcourt to its South and Enugu city to its North. Umuhia lies within latitude 5° 32' 0" N and longitude 7° 29' 0" E.

### Study Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population for the study comprised all customers of selected registered hotels in Umuahia, metropolis in Abia State. Five (5) hotels were used for this study based on perceived popularity. The population for this study was unknown and thus infinite. To determine the sample size, Cochran (1977) {cited in Anyanwu (2019)} formular for determining sample size for an infinite population was used and it gave a sample size of 246. Convenient sampling technique was used in administering the instrument for data collection with the assistance of two research assistants.

### Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire.

The questions were closed ended and adopted four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three lecturers in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management to ascertain its relevance for the present study. To ensure reliability of the instrument, it was administered on a 20 respondents made up of customers of hotels not used for the study at the outskirts of Umuahia, Abia State. The customers filled the questionnaire and internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha reliability test, which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.81 and thus was considered useable. However, Cronbach Alpha was used because the instrument was not dichotomously scored.

### Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The researcher presented a letter of introduction to the management of the hotels to gain access to the customers. Copies of questionnaire were administered on the respondents with the help of two research assistants and retrieved at once. This increased the return rate.

The data collected for the study were analysed using regression analysis. The model specification is given below:

The multiple linear regression equation is given by

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + e_{it}$$

#### Where:

Y = dependent variable

$\alpha_0$  = the Y intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3,$  and  $\beta_4$  = coefficient of the dependent variables

$e_{it}$  = error term

#### Thus;

Y = Furnishing



$X_1$  = brand awareness  
 $X_2$  = brand association  
 $X_3$  = perceived quality  
 $X_4$  = brand loyalty

### Results of Inferential Statistics and Discussions

This subsection of the study, presents the data analysis, interpretation and test of hypotheses. First, it presents the descriptive statistics of the total ratings/scores of the variables used in the study. Then, the regression estimates, which were used in testing the null hypotheses formulated for this study.

**Table 1.1** Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Furnishing	25.0732	3.64142	246
Brand Awareness	27.6585	2.10084	246
Brand Association	20.6382	2.13312	246
Perceived Quality	22.9187	2.90838	246
Brand Loyalty	26.4634	2.48191	246

**Source:** Field Survey 2019

From table 1.1 above, the mean column indicates that the average score of furnishing in the hotels in Umuahia is 25.0732. Similarly, the mean scores of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are 27.6585, 20.6382, 22.9187, and 26.4634 respectively. The standard deviation scores for furnishing, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are 3.64142, 2.10084, 2.13312, 2.90838, and 2.48191 respectively. The standard deviation values indicate that the score for furnishing has the highest variation rate, when

compared to other variables. This implies that the scores/ratings of the respondents regarding the state of furnishing in the hotels in Umuahia were much more apart when compared with the other variables. The brand awareness recorded the lowest standard deviation value, which means that the perception of the respondents concerning brand awareness is not much apart when compared with other variables.

**$H_{o1}$  There is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand awareness in hotel operation.**

**Table 1.2** Regression Estimate for Hypothesis One

Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	sig.
Furnishing	0.366	12.804	0.000
(Constant)	8.488	11.729	0.000
R Squared	0.402		
Adjusted R-squared	0.399		

F-Statistics	163.934
Sig.	.000

**Source:** SPSS 25 Regression Estimate for Hypothesis One

Table 1.2 above shows the R squared value as 0.402, indicating that the independent variable explained about 40.2% of the total variations observed in the dependent variable. This means that furnishing explained about 40.2% of the total variations observed in the brand awareness. In other words, furnishing has about 40.2% influences on brand awareness in hotel operation. The F-statistic value of 163.934 with sig. value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 implies that the model is statistically significant at 5% significance level, meaning that furnishing has significant influence on brand awareness in hotel operation in Umuahia. The coefficient of furnishing is 0.366, indicating that there is a positive relationship between furnishing and brand awareness in hotel operation in Umuahia.

This implies that an increase in furnishing will lead to about 0.366 increases in the level of brand awareness. The t-

statistic value of 12.804 and sig. value of 0.000 indicate that the positive relationship is statistically significant at 5%. Thus, the study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between furnishing and brand awareness in hotel operation. Thus the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand awareness in hotel operation was rejected the alternative was accepted. This result is in line with the findings of Su (2016). Similarly, Anyanwu (2019) maintains that the type and quality of furnishing (tangibles) in a hotel differentiates such brand from other competing brands, thereby creating awareness about the brand by making it easily identifiable by customers in the midst of other brands.

***Ho<sub>2</sub>* There is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand association in hotel operation.**

**Table 1.3** Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Two

Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	sig.
Furnishing	0.394	14.168	0.000
(Constant)	10.771	15.305	0.000
R Squared	0.451		
Adjusted R-squared	0.449		
F-Statistics	200.721		
Sig.	0.000		

**Source:** SPSS 25 Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Two

Table 1.3 above shows the R squared value as 0.451, indicating that the independent variable explained about 45.1% of the total variations observed in the dependent variable. This means that

furnishing explained about 45.1% of the total variations observed in the brand association. Simply put, furnishing has about 45.1% influences on brand association in hotel operation. The F-statistic value of 200.721

with sig. value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 implies that the model is statistically significant at 5% significance level. Meaning that furnishing has significant influence on brand association in hotel operation. The coefficient of furnishing is 0.394, indicating that there is a positive relationship between furnishing and brand association in hotel operations in Umuahia. This implies that an increase in furnishing will lead to about 0.366 increases in the level of brand association. The t-statistic value of 14.168 with a sig. value of 0.000 indicates that the positive relationship is statistically significant at 5%. Thus, the study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between furnishing and brand association in hotel operation.

Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative was accepted

that there is a significant relationship between furnishing and brand association in hotel operation. This result is in line with the findings of Ryan *et al* (2013). Once a brand is easily identifiable by customers, the tendency for such a brand to be registered in human memory becomes a possibility. Customers normally search through their memories to retrieve information during purchase decision making and when purchase decision consistently favours a certain brand, it then follows that such a brand enjoys brand association. This means that the customer will most likely be favourably disposed to adopting such brand.

***H<sub>03</sub>* There is no significant relationship between furnishing and perceived quality in hotel operation.**

**Table 1.4** Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Three

Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	sig.
Furnishing	0.282	4.719	0.000
(Constant)	10.352	6.829	0.000
R Squared	0.084		
Adjusted R-squared	0.080		
F-Statistics	22.271		
Sig.	.000		

**Source:** SPSS 25 Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Three

Table 1.4 above shows the R squared value as 0.084, indicating that the independent variable explained about 8.4% of the total variations observed in dependent variable. Meaning that furnishing explained only about 8.4% of the total variations observed in the perceived quality. Simply put, furnishing has about 8.4% influence on perceived quality in hotel operation. The F-statistic value of 22.721 with sig. value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 implies that the model is statistically

significant at 5% significance level. Meaning that furnishing has significant influence on perceived quality in hotel operation, even though the magnitude of the influence is small. The coefficient of furnishing is 0.282, indicating that there is a positive relationship between furnishing and perceived quality in hotel operation in Umuahia. This implies that an increase in furnishing will lead to about 0.282 increase in customers' perceived quality. The t-statistic value of 4.719 with a sig. value of 0.000 indicates that the positive

relationship is statistically significant at 5%. Hence, the study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between furnishing and perceived quality in hotel operation. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected that there is no significant relationship between furnishing and perceived quality in hotel operation and the alternative was accepted. This result is in line with the findings of Venkatesan *et al* (2015). Service is intangible as such the

customer leaves with nothing other than experience. Therefore, the provision of material markers, physical features, and other forms of furnishing contribute in tangibilizing the intangibility element of service thereby enhancing service quality perception (Su, 2016; Anyanwu, 2019).

***Ho<sub>4</sub>* There is no significant relationship between furnishing and loyalty in hotel operation.**

**Table 1.5** Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Four

Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	sig.
Furnishing	0.298	7.580	0.000
(Constant)	19.003	19.107	0.000
R Squared	0.191		
Adjusted R-squared	0.187		
F-Statistics	57.454		
Sig.	.000		

**Source:** SPSS 25 Regression Estimate for Hypothesis Three

Table 1.5 above shows the R squared value as 0.191, indicating that the independent variable explained about 19.1% of the total variations observed in dependent variable. Meaning that furnishing explained only about 19.1% of the total variations observed in the brand loyalty. Simply put, furnishing has about 19.1% influence on brand loyalty in hotel operation. The F-statistic value of 57.454 with sig. value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 implies that the model is statistically significant at 5% significance level. Meaning that furnishing has significant influence on brand loyalty in hotel operation. The coefficient of furnishing is 0.298, indicating that there is a positive relationship between furnishing and brand loyalty in hotel operation in Umuahia. This implies that an increase in furnishing will lead to about 0.298 increase in brand loyalty. The t-

statistic value of 7.580 with a sig. value of 0.000 indicates that the positive relationship is statistically significant at 5%.

Therefore, the study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between furnishing and brand loyalty in hotel operation. Thus, rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between furnishing and brand loyalty in hotel operation. And accept the alternative that there is a significant relationship between furnishing and brand loyalty in hotel operation. This result is in line with the findings of Marcus (2011); Su (2016) but contrary to the findings of Anyanwu (2019). The implication of this finding is that the achievement of brand loyalty in service delivery should be an all-encompassing activity in hotel operation. The image a customer has about a hotel derives from a lot of factors including

tangibles (furnishing) and such an image can make or mar purchase intentions, customer satisfaction, and ultimately brand loyalty.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

In view of the findings of the study, it is then concluded that furnishing has a positive and significant relationship with consumer based brand equity in hotel operations in the study area. The implication is that furnishing can help drive up consumer based brand equity in hotel operations. In the light of this, the following recommendations are given:

1. Managers and facilitators of hotels should adopt attractive customer-oriented furnishing to sustain and improve the level of its brand awareness and differentiate its offerings from those of competitors.
2. An outstanding furnishing could create a long-lasting impression in the minds of customers. Therefore, the study recommends that hotel management should strive to install unique furniture and other facilities to instigate positive brand association.
3. Customer comfort and safety should be adequately considered when furnishing hotels to enhance perceived quality.
4. Finally, the study recommends that continuous improvement in the entire furnishing infrastructure of hotel operation and sustainable strategies such as proper maintenance should be carried out regularly to achieve brand loyalty in hotel operation.

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