

## Online Service Packaging and Organizational Competitiveness of Fast-Food Firms in Port Harcourt.

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### ABSTRACT

The study's primary objective was to determine whether there was a connection between competitiveness and online service packaging. The 52 registered fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt were surveyed, with data collected from upper-, middle-, and first-line management. The study included 52 fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt that were registered. 208 participants made up the study's sample. Research participants were chosen using a convenience sample method that considered their level of education, work experience, dedication, and openness to participate. A total of 218 replies were obtained from the 52 fast-food companies, with 4 questionnaires issued to each. Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data in this study using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient. According to the study, fast food businesses in Port Harcourt can benefit from a strong relationship between online service packaging and indices of organizational competitiveness. As a result, fast food chains should routinely gauge customer satisfaction with the packaging of their online services to boost product and service competitiveness.

**Keywords:** *Online Service Packaging, Sensory Packaging, Visual Merchandizing Packaging, Organizational Competitiveness.*

### 1.1. Introduction

Companies all around the globe have come to realize that the start of the epidemic has inspired new ideas and approaches to old problems. The fast food industry has seen a sea change in its operating techniques and organizational structures since the advent of COVID-19. Among the many businesses hit hard by the COVID-19 epidemic was the fast food industry, which shared in the worldwide economic downturn. Fast food chains have seen a drop in revenue as a result of the spread and start of the epidemic. The development of a cutting-edge, trustworthy digital system is, hence, crucial for fast food chains to investigate alternative service delivery techniques in order to increase their market competitiveness. In addition, fast food chains should make it a top priority to create a sustainable system for food delivery that enhances supply chain safety, consumption, and distribution.

Modern customers are savvier than ever before, and they won't hesitate to voice their displeasure if and when it occurs. Consumers will be more likely to make repeat visits to an online service if they are pleasantly impressed by its presentation, which includes the presentation of the food itself, the ambiance of the restaurant (Mfon & Uford, 2022), the layout of the space, and the flavor of the cuisine. In order to avoid a decline in sales caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, most businesses in Port Harcourt came up with sustainable alternative plans. Online sales systems were also adopted by fast food chains as a means of adaptation; this was not something they did very often before the pandemic. Assuming they are satisfied with the services offered online, customers may conveniently make orders for fast food from the comfort of their own homes via the websites of these businesses. Fast food chains saw an opportunity to enhance customer service and marketing results by implementing online service packaging. So, it's safe to say that marketing online service packaging works. According to LaMarco (2019), consumers are more likely to return, make repeat purchases, and suggest a business after having an exceptional customer service experience. According to Deliya and Parmar (2012), the increased demand for customer self-service operations necessitates an evolution of the system of packaged online services in a highly competitive market. Online service packaging has great persuasive power and attracts consumers to specific services, however according to Nzumile and Taifa (2019), many medium-sized businesses do not value it. In recent years, online service packaging has grown in importance as a promotional tool for businesses, especially those in the fast-food industry. The quality of a company's packaging—its contents, colors, designs, and more—increases its competitiveness. One of a company's unique selling points that might encourage customers to make impulsive purchases is its packaging approach. Businesses may increase their sales and market share while decreasing their advertising expenses by carefully packaging their online offerings.

The packaging of online services is complex, spanning many different areas in order to communicate information about the company and its products. According to Silayoi and Speece (2007), it's a great way for customers to voice their opinions and concerns about products and services. An online service's packaging should include all of the product's physical characteristics, such as its shape, color, labeling, and the equipment's feel or substance, as stated by Arens (2007). Managing, preserving, conveying, and showcasing a product or service to the client on an internet platform is what online service packaging is all about (Dixon-Hardy & Curran, 2009). Secure, maintained, processed, and presented online from service provider to consumer—that is what online service packaging is all about. Secure and discrete delivery of services and content with items is vital in online commerce, and packaging plays a key role in this. In Yola and Jimeta, Adamawa State, Nigeria, Adeola (2017) looked at how product packaging affected people's consumption habits. Among Arugha City's small businesses, Lomayani (2021) investigated the impact of packaging on consumers' purchasing decisions. When it comes to packaged goods, Muhammad et al. (2019) looked into the delivery service. The effect of product packaging on consumers' propensity to buy was investigated by Chukwu and Enudu (2018).

No fast food establishment in Port Harcourt was the subject of any of the aforementioned studies that the researcher is aware of. According to the reviewed literature, there is a dearth of studies looking at the relationship between fast food companies' online service packaging and their competitiveness as an industry. Instead of focusing on the aforementioned, the researcher in Port Harcourt looked at how fast food businesses' competitive advantage correlated with the packaging of their services offered online.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Companies now use packaging as a promotional tool to boost the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns, both in terms of competition and sales. One major strategy that companies are using to gain an edge in the market is online packaging services. Customers' buying habits and decisions are impacted by how fast food chains showcase their products and services online. Suitable.

Many businesses have come to rely on packaging their services online which is a vital marketing techniques for them, but not all fast food firms in Port Harcourt have utilized the use of this strategy to promote their wares, services, ambience, service delivery and customer care procedures and this have led to a drop in sales volume, a stagnation in their market share, and a decrease in profitability as a result of the perceived problem. Secondly, lots of fast food firm's websites are not active and getting much traffic became a problem to them. Furthermore, most fast-food firms in Port Harcourt do not promote their websites as a platform to place orders, provide comments, or offer recommendations for their goods and services.

These observable problems have negatively impacted the competitive strength of these fast-food firms in relation to their counterparts overseas where digitalization of businesses is the order of the day. Studies on online service packaging in relation to organizational competitiveness of fast-food firms in Port Harcourt is partially lacking.

Given this background, the study tries to determine whether fast food firms in Port Harcourt may gain competitive advantage by improving their online service packaging.

Hence, this study tries to examine how online service packaging relates with organizational competitiveness of fast food firms in Port Harcourt.

## **2.0 Review of Related Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Kano's Theory of Attractive Quality and Packaging**

The Motivator-Hygiene Theory proposed by Herzberg (Herzberg, 1966). In 1985, Kano et al. developed the attractive quality model. The concept was born out of a desire to learn more about the many ways in which consumers evaluate and interpret aspects that are considered high-quality. The appealing quality hypothesis classifies product features into five areas of perceived

quality and lays out the relationship between sufficiency levels and customer pleasure: Attributes like this include inverse quality, essentiality, indifference, one-dimensionality, and attractiveness. An inadequate one-dimensional understanding of quality led to the proposal of the notion of attractive quality, according to Kano (2001). In most cases, customers are happy to hear that a product has a long shelf life, but they're not happy to hear that their favorite product has a short one.

## **2.2 Concept of Online Service Packaging**

A product's packaging consists of its design, labeling, shape, and wrapping, all of which are used by a business to protect, store, transport, and advertise the product. Companies often use high-quality packaging as a marketing strategy. Product information, safety features, and contact information are all provided. According to Naik (2015), online service packaging is the structure that protects a service or group of services on the internet by making them look better. As a promotional tool, online service packaging is an element of marketing strategy. According to Li et al. (2018), a good online service package has the potential to provide a positive first impression and encourage customers to have a positive mindset. A business might get a competitive edge through efficient online service packaging (Rundh, 2013). Building high-quality web services has the potential to stimulate interest and enthusiasm (Tanderup et al., 2019). Content and a positive impression of product and service quality may be conveyed to the client through an online services bundle (Rundh, 2013). Customer experience and brand perception are impacted by the quality of online service packaging (Joutscla et al., 2016). Companies employ unique marketing propositions, such as online service packaging, to entice customers to make impulsive purchases (Kuvykaite et al., 2009). It is critical to recognize that offering packaged services online is a cornerstone of prosperous businesses. Internet service packaging is defined by Hellstrom (2007) as a methodical strategy for preparing goods and services for sale, distribution, storage, and final use on an internet platform. The marketing and promotion of a company's products and services to both current and potential customers is what makes online service packaging stand out (Etuk, Uford & Udonde, 2023).

### **2.2.1. Dimensions of Online Service Packaging**

#### **2.2.2. Sensory Packaging**

All five senses-sight, smell, taste, and hearing-are part of the sensory package, which has the potential to improve the fast-food industry's relationship with its customers. Customers' mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions to all interactions with a business and its brands make up their "holistic perception," according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016). People often make purchase judgments based on what they see via their many senses, even when they aren't consciously aware of it. According to Krishna et al. (2017). "Sensory packaging" was defined by Krishna (2011) as a method by which businesses influence consumers' perceptions, behaviors, decisions, and judgments through the stimulation of their senses. A new kind of packaging called "sensory packaging" uses all five senses to create an unforgettable and memorable experience for

the buyer. Companies may promote their products and services online more effectively with the adoption and continued use of sensory packaging.

### **2.2.3. Visual Merchandising Packaging**

The goal of visual merchandising packaging is to improve the aesthetics and layout of a company's online services by integrating product ambiance and spatial arrangement into an engaging and dynamic display of goods and services on an online platform. Lighting, graphics, color, and visual merchandising are all aspects of online service packaging that have been seen to have an immediate and appealing effect on customers' purchase decisions. Music, color, decor, atmosphere, graphics, flooring, and flat-screen videos are now more important to customers than the products themselves when shopping online. These features help to convey the firm's character and brand identity in a unique online environment, creating a memorable shopping experience (McGoldrick, 2002; Marsh, 2005).

The "communication" components of an online store's physical layout are those that involve signals and stimuli that consumers can easily perceive using their five senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. However, visual merchandising packaging is crucial to recognizing the online retail environment as a powerful marketing strategy. Scholars and marketing experts agree that visual simulation and communication are essential to the success of online service providers (McGoldrick, 2002). Online service packaging, according to Davies and Ward (2005), must take visual marketing into account. A visual marketing package includes all internal and external internet actions that impact customers, creating a favorable impression of a service provider and improving client purchasing behavior.

### **2.3. Organizational Competitiveness**

Organizations use the notion of competitiveness to develop marketing strategies for strategic rivalry in the marketplace (Porter, 1990). It also shows how well a corporation can do in a very cutthroat market. According to Dobbin and Baum (2000), in order for an organization to be successful in the online business world, it must strive to develop and foster qualities that provide it an advantage over its rivals. According to Liu (2013), the ability to implement a strategy that differentiates oneself in the business environment through continuous learning and program development is what gives one a lasting competitive edge. Organizations should continuously focus the wellness, human development, and personal improvement of their personnel if they want to attain sustainable marketing objectives (Srivastava et al., 2013). Organizations that leverage expert knowledge in their day-to-day operations and prioritize the acquisition of unique resources related to human capital development and other valuable assets are more likely to outperform their competitors and achieve favorable market positioning, according to Lin and Chu (2011). One way for a business to achieve its goals is to create and maintain an atmosphere that is favorable to competition. In 1998, Colgate... According to Passemard and Kleiner (2000), there are five strategic sources of innovation that can be used to gain a competitive advantage:

new technologies, changes in demand and emerging demands, new market segments, changes in production costs and availability, and changes in regulatory policies. An organization can gain an edge over its rivals if it offers better service at lower prices, resolves customer complaints more effectively, is more reliable, has a more efficient customer service team, and can deliver services more quickly. As a whole, the company's marketing efforts could benefit from these cutting-edge strategies (Mentzer et al., 2000). With a strong competitive edge, a company may outperform its competitors, leading to better marketing, more sales, happier and more loyal customers, and more profits.

### **2.3.1. Online Service Packaging and Organizational Competitiveness**

According to Mazhar et al. (2005), when packaging is attractive and has all necessary elements, customers are more likely to purchase the product or service. Businesses that ask their customers for feedback on how to best package their online goods and services are more likely to attract customers, who will then buy more of their products and services, be more loyal to the brand, and spend more money overall (Uford, Charles & Etuk, 2022). Online service packaging is a crucial marketing tool for organizations to increase their online patronage, according to Oladele et al. (2015). This is because clients are informed about the firm's reputation, services, and image through good packaging. According to Sajuyigbe et al. (2013), online service packaging is an important part of creating a positive reputation for a business and its products or services among consumers. Companies may actively promote their goods and services to potential customers by using online service packaging, according to Lundberg and Fredman (2015).

### **2.3.2. Sensory Packaging and Organizational Competitiveness**

The audible sound is an independent aural event that arises from a single incident. Given that speaking entails both hearing and producing sound, the effect of an object's sound is substantial. For a brand name to be well-received, it ought to reflect what consumers anticipate from the brand. Fast food should use enticing aural labeling. As the aural experience observed when navigating the company's website, music boosts mood and stimulates online purchase behavior. Associating music with a message makes it easier for consumers to remember certain sounds, which in turn influences their mood, buying patterns, and the significance of symbols in consumer behavior. The little but powerful organ of taste—the tongue—is responsible for discerning between sweet, bitter, sour, and salty flavors. Various outside elements, such as nutritional information, product specifics, physical attributes, and brand name, might affect taste, according to Hoch and Ha (1986). The way a taste is perceived is often influenced by the brand name. Customer loyalty at fast food joints is strongly impacted by the taste of the meal. The significance of the organization's brand is enhanced by the fact that it impacts perceived taste. Customers are more likely to have a positive impression of a brand when the name is consistent with their expectations. In addition, a memorable fast food brand name increases customer loyalty, which in turn boosts the company's competitiveness and marketing efforts. Consequently, we propose the hypothesis that:



**H<sub>01</sub>:** There exists no substantial correlation between sensory packaging and organizational competitiveness of fast-food firms in Port Harcourt.

### **2.3.3. Visual Merchandising Packaging and Organizational Competitiveness**

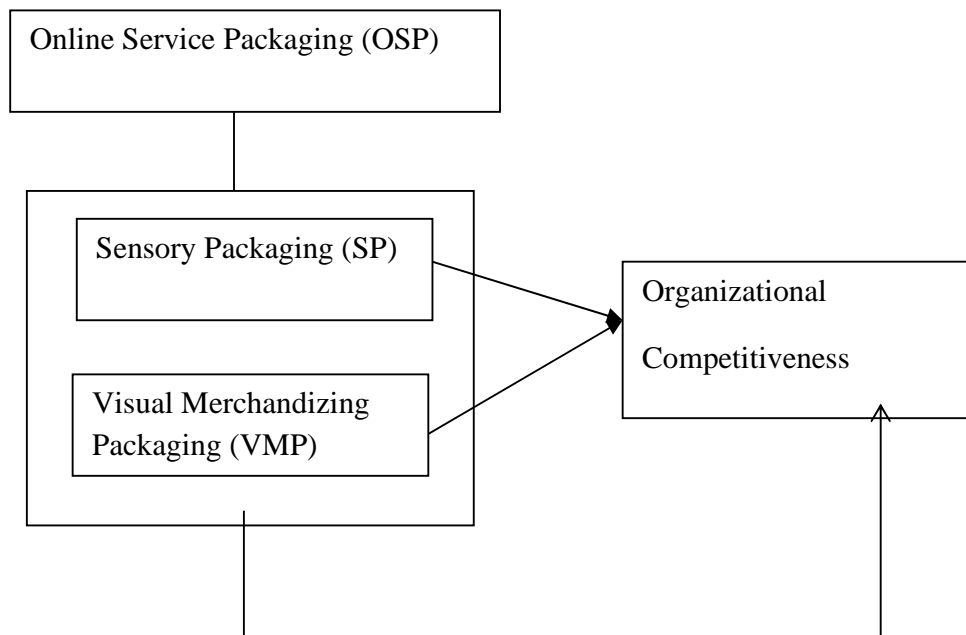
Every company needs a plan to attract and retain customers, and one of the most important ones is to offer convenient, affordable, and aesthetically pleasing online service options at any time and from any place. The competitiveness of a company versus its rivals may be enhanced by using several of these business methods. Fast food restaurants can reduce customer wait times through the use of visual marketing packaging that features online selections that provide entertainment. Online service design or presentation strategies could be utilized by innovative and creative businesses to improve clients' perceptions of the service environment. Signage, graphics, lighting, and color schemes are all examples of visual message that they may use to improve their online service experience. One of the most important aspects of internet marketing is the use of visual packaging to help customers choose services or goods, increase retention, and encourage impulsive purchases. Despite its obvious marketing potential, many fast food chains fail to use visually mechanized packaging. According to Walters and Waters (1987), effective visual merchandising packaging entails managing a well-selected array of products and actively presenting those products on a website. Visual marketing packaging, according to Kerfoot et al. (2003), includes both the online display of service goods and brands to consumers and their proper perception of the message. Packaging that visually appeals to consumers in the hopes that they will make an impulsive purchase is known as visual merchandising. In this partnership, the company and the web designer may build and present an online offering, drawing in customers both old and new. Happy consumers are more inclined to make impulsive purchases while shopping online, setting the business apart from rivals and increasing revenue and profit. Therefore, we propose that:

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There exists no substantial correlation between visual merchandising packaging and organizational competitiveness of fast-food firms in Port Harcourt.

### **3.0. Methodology**

Standardized information was collected from a sample of respondents using a cross-sectional survey methodology in an uncontrolled setting. Those in charge at all levels of registered fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt (Yellow Pages, 2016/2017) are included in the study population. There were fifty-two (52) fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt that were part of the research. Despite the small sample size, the researcher made sure the data was reliable by looking at every single component of the population. A total of 288 participants were surveyed for the study. A non-probability sampling strategy was used in the investigation. Each of the fifty-two (52) participants received four (4) copies of the questionnaire; hence, a grand total of two hundred and eight (208) responses. In order to choose participants who were knowledgeable, dedicated, and eager to participate, the study used a convenience sample method. Statistical Product and

Service Solutions (SPSS) software was used to examine the data using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient.



**Fig 1: 1.** Operational Framework showing the relationship between online service packaging and organizational competitiveness of fast-food firms in Port Harcourt.

Source: Researcher's Desk, 2024.

#### 4.1. Presentation and Data Analysis

##### Analysis of Questionnaire

**Table 4.1**

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Distributed	208	100
Retrieved and usable	202	97.1
Not retrieved and not usable	7	2.9

**Source: Survey data, 2024.**

Table 4.1 illustrates the distribution and retrieval process of the questionnaire for the research. Consequently, several questionnaires were incomplete, had erroneous information, or were deemed inadequate and thus excluded from the research. Two hundred and eight (208) questionnaires were issued, of which two hundred and two (202) were returned, yielding a response rate of 97.1%. One copy, representing 2.9%, was not retrieved and was deemed unusable. The link between sensory packaging and organizational competitiveness assessed how



the effectiveness of sensory packaging enhances product quality and fosters organizational innovation. The test results are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Correlation Analysis showing the Relationship between Sensory Packaging and Product Quality and Organizational Innovation**

			Sensory Packaging	Product Quality	Organizational Innovation
Spearman's rho	Sensory Packaging	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.911**	.944**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Product Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.911**	1.000	.849**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Organizational Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.944**	.849**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	202	202	202

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output.

***H<sub>01</sub>: Fast food companies in Port Harcourt do not make a difference when it comes to sensory packaging and product quality.***

There was a strong relationship between fast food firms' sensory packaging and the quality of their meals, according to the correlation coefficient (rho). At a significance level of  $p < 0.0005$ , the correlation value of 0.911 demonstrated a robust link. A high value for the correlation coefficient suggested that the two factors were highly related. Fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should pay close attention to sensory packing since it significantly affects product quality.

***Hypothesis 1: Fast food companies in Port Harcourt do not innovate their organizational structures in response to changes in sensory packaging.***

There was a strong relationship between sensory packaging and organizational innovation in Port Harcourt's fast food businesses, according to the correlation coefficient (rho). The strength of this link was confirmed by the correlation coefficient of 0.944, which was statistically significant at  $p < 0.0005$ . There was a strong positive relationship between the two variables, as shown by the correlation coefficient. When it comes to fast food businesses in Port Harcourt, sensory packaging and organizational innovation go hand in hand.

**Organizational Competitiveness and Visual Merchandising Packaging:** This study delves at the ways in which innovative and high-quality visual merchandising packaging may boost an organization's competitiveness. Table 4.3 displays the test results.

**Table 4.3: Correlation Analysis showing the Relationship between Visual Merchandizing Packaging and Product Quality and Organizational Innovation**

			Visual Merchandizing Packaging	Product Quality	Organizational Innovation
Spearman's rho	Visual Merchandizing Packaging	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.915**	.908**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Product Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.915**	1.000	.849**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Organizational Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.908**	.849**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	202	202	202

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output.**

***Ho2: Fast food companies in Port Harcourt do not use visual merchandising packaging to improve the quality of their meals.***

The visual merchandising packaging and product quality of fast food businesses in Port Harcourt are strongly correlated ( $\rho = 0.915$ ), according to the study, which shows a strong and significant link ( $p < 0.05$ ). A strong and statistically significant relationship between the variables was shown by the correlation coefficient. Hence, fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt might benefit greatly from investing in visual merchandising packaging to improve the quality of their products.

***The second hypothesis states that fast food companies in Port Harcourt do not significantly differ in their organizational innovation and visual merchandising packaging.***

The above table shows the correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) between fast food firms in Port Harcourt and visual merchandising packaging in relation to organizational innovation. A strong and statistically significant link was shown by the correlation value of 0.908, with a p-value of less

than 0.0005. A strong positive relationship between the two variables was shown by the correlation coefficient. Fast food firms in Port Harcourt can benefit greatly from incorporating visual merchandising packaging into their innovative business strategies.

#### **4.2. Discussion of Findings**

##### **i. Sensory packaging significantly and positively correlates with organizational competitiveness.**

Sensory packaging was anticipated to significantly influence organizational competitiveness, as this outcome reflects fast food managers' perceptions of their business environment. Nonetheless, the capacity of sensory packaging to account for a significant portion of the variance in organizational competitiveness aligns with prior studies on the subject, which indicated that perceptions of packaging and awareness forecasted measures of organizational competitiveness, such as product quality and innovation.

The first hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ), looks at fast food firms in Port Harcourt and sees whether there's a connection between the sensory packing and the quality of the meal. Sensory packaging was strongly correlated with product quality ( $\rho$ ), with a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05), the strength of this link was verified by the correlation coefficient of 0.911, there is a robust relationship between the variables, as shown by the correlation coefficient.

Among the fast food firms in Port Harcourt, the second hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) seeks to learn more about the relationship between sensory packaging and organizational innovation. Table 1, shows the correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) showing strong relationships between sensory packaging and organizational innovation in Port Harcourt's fast food firms. With a probability value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , the strength of the association was confirmed by the correlation coefficient of 0.944. A strong positive relationship between the two variables was shown by the correlation coefficient. Hence, there is a strong relationship between the innovativeness and sensory packaging of fast food firms in Port Harcourt.

The result of this study conforms to Adeola's (2017) findings, which demonstrated a favorable and substantial correlation between sensory packaging and brand awareness. Chukwu and Enudu (2018) also found a substantial positive correlation between independent variables, including attractive packaging and impulsive purchase, and the dependent variable, consumer buying behavior. They further determined that appealing packaging significantly influences consumer purchase behavior, enhances perceived worth and quality of the firm's product, attracts customers, and stimulates impulsive buying. The package components, including color, material, wrapper design, and innovation, are critical variables from the consumer's viewpoint.

**ii. Visual merchandizing packaging significantly and positively correlates with organizational competitiveness and as such enhances indices such as product quality and organizational innovation**

Fast food managers' views about their work environment are reflected in visual merchandising packaging, which was thought to have a substantial impact on organizational competitiveness. From the test of  $H_0$ , this states that fast food firms in Port Harcourt may benefit from using visual merchandising packaging to boost product quality. There was a strong relationship between the visual merchandising packaging and the product quality of fast food firms in Port Harcourt, according to the correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ). With a p-value of 0.000, which is lower than 0.05, the robust relationship was shown by the correlation coefficient of 0.915. A high value for the correlation coefficient suggested a substantial relationship between the two metrics. As a result, fast food firms in Port Harcourt might benefit greatly from investing in visual merchandising packaging to improve the quality of their products. Hence, there is a strong relationship between the innovativeness of fast food firms in Port Harcourt and sensory packaging. Adeola (2017), found a positive and strong association between sensory packaging and brand awareness; our results supports that conclusion. Attractive packaging and impulsive purchases were identified as independent factors with a strong positive link with consumer buying behavior (Chukwu and Enudu, 2018). In addition, they found that attractive packaging greatly affects consumer buying behavior, boost perceived value and quality of the company's goods, attracts consumers, and brings about impulsive purchases.

## **5.0. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The packaging of online services influences the competitive edge of fast food companies in Port Harcourt. Empirical evidence confirms that online service packaging enhances the competitive advantage of fast food firms. Consequently, the study suggests that the dimensions of the predictor variable, when effectively applied, may greatly enhance improve the competitive advantage among fast food enterprises in Port Harcourt. The study shows that a positive and substantial relationship exists between online service packaging and the organizational competitiveness of fast food firms in Port Harcourt.

Based on the findings and results, we recommend that:

- i. To remain sustainable in the current competitive and digital marketplace, fast food companies must effectively implement online service packaging as a competitive strategy to achieve the necessary cost levels for fostering customer loyalty and on-going patronage.
- ii. Fast food companies should regularly assess consumer reactions to their online services packaging to improve the competitiveness of their products and services throughout the sector.

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