Store Layout: An Investigative Study on Affective Evaluation and Customer Response of Hypermarkets in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigates the relationship between store layout, affective evaluation and customer response of hypermarkets in Nigeria. Four thousand (4000) active customers drawn from the customer care database of four hypermarkets in South-South region of Nigeria serves as the population of the study, with a sample size of three hundred and fifty two, derived through the application of krejcie and morgan technique. Questionnaire was used to elicit information from respondents. Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) techniques at 0.5% error levels of significance. Findings revealed that store layout positively and significantly influenced customer affective evaluation and customer response in hypermarkets. The study concluded that store layout played a significant role on how customer affectively evaluate and respond to merchandize in hypermarkets. The study recommends that operators of hypermarkets should embrace innovative store layout strategy that will enhance customers' affective evaluation and response in their market space.

Keywords: Store layout, Customer Perception, Affective Evaluation and Customer Response

1. Introduction

In a traditional retailing business, the environment is the most focus aspect to the business owner. In another spheres, changes in the business world ranging from competition from those in the same sphere of business and customer preference levels, as well as innovative ambience influence the perceptions of customer in the retailing industry. In the modern society the retailing industry has increase in scope through the integration of technology, economic and demographic changes (Ihfiyar, Ahmad & Osman, 2014; Kumar & Kim, 2014; Ogden, 2005). Retailing industry played a vital role in meeting the needs of a modern society as well as a significant component of an action economy (Bawa, Gupta & Sharma 2013). It is premise upon this that scholars emphasized that innovative ambience such as design and social factors has a strong influenced on customer buying behaviour and perception (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss 2002; Liao, Huang & Deesentham 2012;

Seok, 2009). Furthermore, store innovative ambience impact not only on impulse buying, but also on patronage (Mohan, Sivakumaran, Shanna, 2013). The trend in information technology in business pursuit has created an increasing interest in developing tools for making the point of sale more attractive in terms of store appealing, product display, as well as facilities for consumers (Pantano & Naccarato, 2010; Laria & Pantano, 2011).

There is no doubt that advancement in information and communication technology has enhanced the layout of stores in the retailing industry. Man and Nikorhova (2017) admitted that technological innovation such as Mobile Apps, Scan-and-go technologies, self check out, and smart self technology are some of the technological innovative advancement in retail hypermarkets today. Customers are attracted to good designs that give superior customer experience through the use of technology (Verhoef, Peter, Katherine, Lemon, Parasuraman, & Schlesinger, 2009). It is quite worrisome that the layout of most hypermarkets does not fit into the current technological innovative advancement, hence, affecting the perception of customer buying behaviour and produces specific emotional effects on the minds of the buyers. This paper is a relational study established on how store layout enhances customer perception through affective evaluation and customer response toward hypermarkets in Nigeria.

The study is organized as introduction in part one, part two carries out the review of relevant literatures, methodology is in part three, part four comprises of result and discussion, part five is the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 Store Layout

Store layout refers to where both the merchandise and other structures and facilities are physically located with the effect of creating a particular pattern of people traffic (Miller, 2008). Levy and Weitz (2009) stated that store layouts are created to guide customers through the store and help them in locating and finding information about products. Dunne, Lusch and Carver (2011) emphasized that layout in the retail store industry consists of three principles: circulation, coordination, and convenience. The authors stated that the principle of circulation provides for arrangements that facilitate the control of traffic flow through the store; coordination refers to the arrangement of merchandise in such places to help in

promoting sales, creating goodwill, and furnishing subject matter for publicity; and convenience is arranging items to furnish a high degree of convenience to the customer and personnel. Store layouts can facilitate the efficient flow of shoppers and decreases the feeling of crowding as well as eliminating the psychological costs of negative feelings and diminishes price perceptions (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999; Titus & Everett, 1995). It is scholarly established that a good layout can make shopping more fun and more enjoyable by decreasing the stress and evoking a positive effect (Yoo et al, 1998; Baker et al, 2002). In the same way, a good layout can make store merchandise more impressive, giving the impression that more products are displayed than actually exist (Morates *et al*, 2005).

In addition, scholars identified different types of layout such as: forced-path layout, counter store layout, grid layout, race track layout, free form layout, as well as mixed layout (Ebester & Garau, 2015). Dhotre (2010) supported the viewed above, but added loop layout and spine layout. The scholar agreed with grid layout and free form layout. The scholars emphasized that loop layout improves the stores productivity, allows retailers to display as many products as possible and encourages impulse buying behavior (Dhotre, 2010). The scholar further stated that spine layout allows retailers to display products at both sides of the aisle in various forms and patterns. Dhotre (2010) states that spine free-flow and loop layout. Hence the traffic flow is arranged in the store as a straight line running from the entrance to the back. DeRosa (2017) asserts that as organizations grow and adapted innovative technologies and practices they are bound to compete effectively in the marketplace.

2.2 Affective Evaluation

Emotional state or affective evaluation is a judgment whether an object is pleasant, attractive, valuable, likable, or preferable (Russell & Snodgrass, 1987). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) hypothesized that any environment is capable of inducing and producing different emotional states in an individual. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggest three dimensions for the emotional states that are developed in an individual's mind pleasure, arousal and dominance, also called the PAD framework. These emotional responses determine the need to remain within or leave a physical environment (Bennett, 2005). These three dimensions commonly represent the organism aspect of the SOR framework. The pleasure aspect

determines whether individuals perceive the environment as enjoyable or not enjoyable. The arousal dimension evaluates how much the environment stimulates the individual. The dominance element relates to whether individuals feel dominant (in control) or submissive (under control) in the environment (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The affective space evoked by environments was found to be better described by pleasantness and arousal dimensions, whereas dominance was not found to have a predictable or significant effect on behavior (Russell & Pratt, 1980; Russell, Ward, & Pratt, 1981; Ward & Russell, 1981). Russell and Barett (1999) attributed the reason for this to the fact that dominance factor is a cognitive component of affective reactions. Studies in both retail and non-retail 34 environments support that the pleasure and arousal dimensions are related to consumer reactions, but the effect of the dominance dimension is unclear (Russell, 1980; Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000). For example, Donovan and Rossiter (1982) found that shopping behaviors were related only to the pleasure and arousal dimensions in a retail setting. Yalch and Spangenberg (2000) state that behaviors associated with dominance are difficult to identify as it reflects only a small influence on behavior. As a result, the dominance dimension is often not measured as an emotional/affective response (Russell, 1980).

Researchers have established the mediating role of pleasantness and arousal in the context of store environments. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) find pleasantness and arousal to have positive effects on intentions to remain in the store and to spend more money. Baker et al. (1992) find a positive relationship between the emotional states and intention to purchase. In sum, the literature review suggests that consumers affective evaluations can be explained in terms of pleasure and arousal dimensions. Further, pleasure and arousal mediate the relationship between the store atmosphere and consumers response to the store atmosphere.

2.3 Customer Response

Response is associated with the psychological reactions such as: attitudes and behavioral reactions of consumers (Bagozzi, 1986). The retail atmosphere has been found to influence customer behavioral intention, which is composed of different dimensions such as number of items purchased, amount of money spent in the store, and whether the shopper liked the store environment or not (Sherman & Smith, 1986). In the retailing context, response to store stimuli is often termed as approach or avoidance behavior. Approach is the desire to remain in the store, continue

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shopping and willingness to stay for relatively long periods. In contrast, 35 avoidance behaviors are associated with negative reactions including a desire to leave the store and not return (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Approach-avoidance behaviors are the actions resulting from individual internal states. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggest that approach behaviors include physical approach, work performance, exploration, and social interaction.

Turley and Milliman (2000) suggest that atmospheric variables lead to a certain behavioral response by the consumer such as time spent in the store, items examined, information acquired, and satisfaction. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) also suggest several responses applicable to a retail environment, including the number of items purchased, amount of time and money spent in the store, and whether the consumer likes the store environment. Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) identified five dimensions of behavioral intention: intention to remain loyal, propensity to switch, disposition to pay more, external response to problem, and internal response to problem. Donovon and Rossiter (1982) found that approach behavior and the related behavioral intentions are highly influenced by the emotional responses to an atmosphere within an environment. Researchers have also found a direct relationship between atmospheric dimensions of an environment and the approach-avoidance behavior (Crowley, 1993; Hirsch, 1995; Herrington & Capella, 1996). In summary, atmospheric stimulus has an impact on the intervening mental evaluative state, which, in turn, affects the response toward the environment.

2.4 Customer Perception

Customer perception is described as acting and reacting on what one sees (Kotler *et al*, 1998). Relating this definition to retail store environment, it implies that customer reacts to what they see in the purchasing environment. In other words, customers' response to a given supermarkets is predicated upon what they see which is capable of arousing their purchasing interest. This is in agreement with the proposition of scholars that customer perception shapes and induced behavioral response (Jones *et al*, 2010).

It is worthy of note that customer perception (CP) is borne out of cognitive theory and the affective theory (Park & McClung, 1985; Park & Young, 1986; Gyo-Lee & Thorson, 2009). The cognitive involvement in customer perception has to do with the thought related reaction generated by stimuli (Blackwell, Miniard & Emgel, 2001). While affective involvement consists of feelings and arousal induced by stimuli (Dube, Cervellon, & Jingyuan, 2003; Yoo & Machlnnis, 2005). This is individual's relationship with any (consumption) object may involve positive feelings of affect, as well as identification.

These theories collectively demonstrated that when consumers are exposed to certain design, social interactions and ambient factors in a store environment they cognitively conceptualize or think about what they see, and if they are affectionate about it, they identify themselves with it and probably arouse positive reaction eventually. Tylee (1989) and Meenaghan (2001) explain that this kind of reaction is similar to what they refer to as see-saw perception toward an object.

Furthermore, Weinslit (1999) posits that consumer perception is identified by the color, shape, and taste of the product. This is equally akin to store environment where interior decoration or design will spark up customers' attention to continuously buy from the store or supermarket. In order words, the way customer processed its selection, organized and interpreting and attaching meaning to events happening in the environment. Put it differently, perception is a process by which an individual (customer) select, organize and interpret stimuli in a meaningful picture of the world. This means that customer might patronize or response to a retail store / supermarket that might have good design factors, ambience and socially related.

Empirical Review

The aim of this section is to review literature that is related to the current study as studied by other researchers in the retail industry. Mortime and Clarke (2010) conducted a study on the importance of store characteristics within a supermarket retail environment in Australia. The study focused on consumer survey of two hundred and eighty (280) male and female grocery shoppers across four major supermarkets. Simple random sampling technique was employed to collect data. The study revealed that significant statistical differences exist between male and female grocery shoppers on all ten store characteristics constructs. The study equally revealed that female grocery shoppers considered supermarket store

characteristics more important than male shoppers. Carpenter and Moore (2006) carried out a research in United States (US) market place with a focus on the relationship between grocery consumers' demographics with their retail format choice. A population of four hundred fifty four (454) US grocery consumers was studied using a self- administered questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, (regression, ANOVA) were used to evaluate the data. The finding identified demographic variables specific to formats, (specialty Grocers, traditional supermarkets, supercenters, warehouse clubs and internet grocers) and examined store attributes (price competitiveness, product selection, and atmosphere) as drivers of format choice. Prasad and Aryasri (2011) made a detailed study on the effect of shoppers' demographic, geographic, and psychographic dimensions in terms of format choice behavior in the fast growing Indian food and grocery retailing. The authors adopted descriptive research design by applying mall intercept survey method using structured questionnaire for data collection. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools like factor analysis and multivariate analysis was used to analyze the data collected from one thousand four hundred(1040) food and grocery retail customers from upgraded neighborhood kirana store, convenience stores, supermarkets, and hypermarkets in conjoin cities of secunderabad and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh in India. The study found that shoppers' age gender, occupation, education and distance travelled to store have significant relationship with retail format choice decision. Seock and Lin (2010) conducted a study on cultural influences on young consumers' loyalty tendency and evaluations of the relative importance of apparel retail store attributes in Taiwan and the USA. A structured questionnaire was developed to obtain data from respondents. Factor analysis was employed to identify dimensions of apparel retail store image attributes. In the study, multivariate analysis of variance and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were used to examine the hypotheses. The results showed that American consumers have significantly greater collectivistic characteristics than Taiwan.

It is obvious that all empirical studies are foreign based. It is equally important to note that the influence of affective evaluation and customer response based on store layout were not captured in the prior studies. Few of the studies were carried out in the supermarkets. Therefore, these are the identifiable gaps in the literature which the current study addresses.

Theoretical Framework

Stimulus-Organism-Response- Model

Mehrabian and Russell's environmental psychology model is based on the stimulus – organism – Response (SOR) paradigm. This model has two assumptions. First, people's (customers) emotions determine what they do and how they do it. Second, customers respond with different sets of emotions to different environment (Tai & Fung, 1997). Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimulus-organism-response model demonstrates the link between physical environment and its effect on an individual's behavior. This implies that a physical environment influences an individual's internal states, which lead him or her to either approach or avoid an environment (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Stimulus–Organism-Response Model has been adopted in the context of retail environment with several studies supporting the relationship between store environment and consumer purchase behavior (Baker, et al, 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Scholars also emphasize that retail store designs that shape a retail space create or alter consumers' mood and impact consumers' behavioral response (Markin, Lillis, & Narayana, 1976). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) applied the SOR framework to a retail store settings and test the link between organism and response valuables. The authors conclude that environmental stimuli have an impact on emotional states of consumers in such a way that consumers may not be fully aware of the stimuli, but the stimuli can indirectly affect consumers' approach or avoidance behavior. This is in line with a study conducted by Baker *et al*, (1994) which emphasized that a retail store can offer a distinctive atmosphere that influences a shopper's patronage decision. Ghosh (1990) argues that atmosphere influences the overall value provided by retailers and defines the concept of retail atmosphere as the psychological effect or feeling created by a store's design and its physical surroundings. The authors further stated that store atmospherics have an impact on the shopper through the sensory channels of sight, sound, scent, and touch. Researchers have studied the effects of five popular atmospheric cues that impact the senses, color and lighting (Bellizzi, Crowley, & Hasty, 1983), social factors (Baker et al, (1992), ambient factors, that is, music and lighting (Baker *et al*, 1992; Kellaris & Kent, 1992; Milliman, 1982, Crowding, Eroglu & Harrel, 1986), and point-of-purchase display (Phillips, 1993; Quekh & Cannon– Bonventre, 1983), store entrances, checkouts, and customer service areas (Newman, Yu, & Oulton, 2002). Based on the above scholarly argument, this study adopts Stimulus-Organism-Response Model as the

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underpinning theory in this study. Based on the literature review above, the research model in the figure below was formulated. Thus:
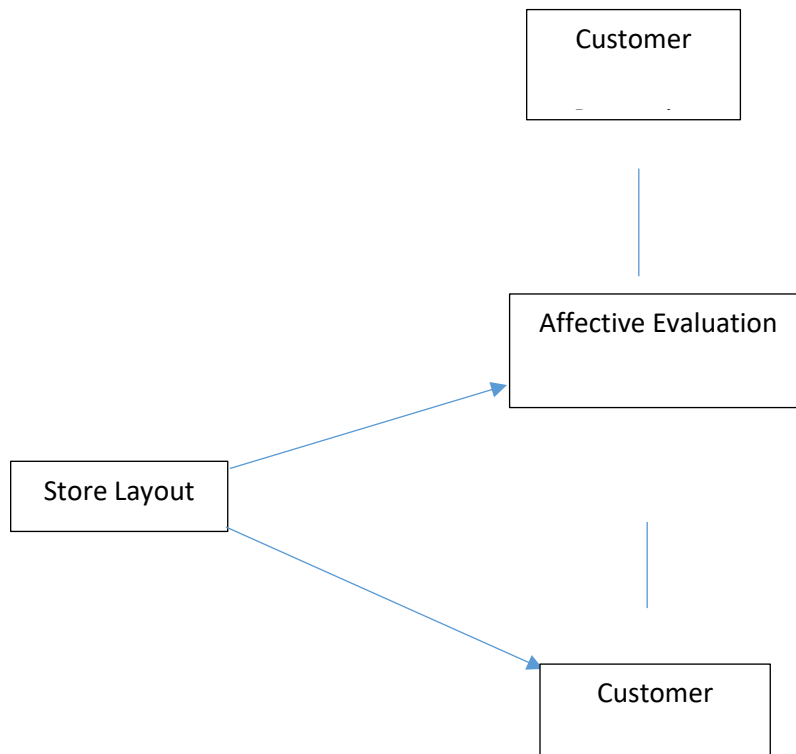
Figure 1.1:

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Model of the Study

The following hypotheses were formulated from the model, thus:

$H0_1$:   Store layout has positive and significant relationship with affective evaluation.

$H0_2$:   Customer response positively and significantly relates with store layout.

3. Research Methodology

The study investigates the relationship between store layout, affective evaluation and customer perception of hypermarkets in South-South region of Nigeria, with 4000 active customers drawn from customer care data base of four hypermarkets, which are; Spar (Port Harcourt), Spar (Calabar), Shoprite (Sapele), and Next Cash and Carry (Port Harcourt). Cross sectional survey design was adopted. Since the Population is known, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination technique was used to arrive at a sample of 352, with an error margin of 5% (0.05). The data for the execution of this study were mainly obtained from primary source. The primary data were gotten from the respondents through the deployment of a structured questionnaire. The expression of the respondents was rated on a five-item likert-scale in which 1 denotes "Poor," 2 denotes "Fair," 3 denotes "Average," 4 denotes "Good," and 5 denotes "Excellent," as well as an "Uncertain" alternative to prevent bias in response. Content validation was used for the instrument validity, while Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to confirm the reliability after carrying out a pilot survey on 35 customers. The Cronbach's alpha score for the constructs was 0.969. Data analysis techniques employed was Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This analysis was computed electronically with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 23.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Results for the Reliability of the Study Instrument

Variables	Number of Items	Alpha Value
Store Layout	5	.834
Affective Evaluation	5	.827
Customer Response	5	.797

Source: Survey Data 2022.

Table 2: Store Layout and Affective Evaluation

Correlations

		Store Layout	Affective Evaluation (AE)
	Pearson Correlation	1	.702**
Store Layout	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	341	341
	Pearson Correlation	.702**	1
Affective Evaluation (AE)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	341	341

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

Source: Survey data, 2022

Table 3: Store Layout and Customer Response
Correlations

		Store Layout	Customer Response
	Pearson Correlation	1	.572**
Store Layout	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	.572**	341
	Pearson Correlation	.000	1
Customer Response	Sig. (2-tailed)	.432	
	N	341	341

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

Source: Survey data, 2022

Discussion of Findings

The result in table 2 shows that store layout correlates with affective evaluation (r = 0.702, p < 0.001). This signifies a very high correlation indicating a normal relationship. The relationship that exists between store layout and affective evaluation is shown to be significant at 0.01 significant levels. Since an R values that is less than 0.20 (r < 0.20) is the yardstick for accepting the null hypotheses and an R values that is greater than or equal to 0.20 (r ≥ 0.20) is the yardstick for rejecting the null hypotheses, based on this guidelines for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis as stipulated by Irving (2005) cited in Ahiazu and Asawo (2016), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between store layout and affective evaluation of hypermarket in south-south region of Nigeria. The result in table 3 shows that store layout correlates with customers response (r = 0.572, p < 0.001), this signifies a very high correlation, indicating a normal relationship. The relationship that exists between store layout and customers response is shown to be significant at 0.01 significant levels. Since an r value that is less than 0.20 (r < 0.20) is the yardstick for accepting the null hypotheses and an r value that is greater than or equal to 0.20 (r ≥ 0.20) is the yardstick for rejecting the null hypotheses, based on this guidelines for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis according to Irving (2005) cited in Ahiazu and Asawo (2016), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis. This was as, the r value obtained from our SPSS computed output was higher than 0.20, that is, r = 0.572 is higher than 0.20. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between store layout and customers response of hypermarket in south-south region of Nigeria. On the test of relationship between store layout, affective evaluation, and customer response, the results on store layout and affective evaluation revealed a strong, significant and positive relationship between the variables. This findings was supported by scholars who admitted that store layout facilitate efficient flow of shoppers and decreases the feeling of crowding as well as eliminating the psychological costs of negative feelings and diminishing price perceptions (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999; Titus & Everett,1995). On the test of relationship between store layout and customer response, the results indicates, strong, positive and significant relationship between the two variables. The findings was supported by Levy and Weitz(2009) who stated store layouts are created to guide customers through the store and help them to locate and find information and products. Vrechopoulos *et al* (2004) admitted that well designed layouts are extremely important, because it influences in-store traffic

pattern, shopping behaviour, as well as operational efficiency. Kumar and Kim (2014) equally affirm the outcome of the results by stating that customer respond to hypermarket is depending on store layout strategy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The finding of the study is based on the results from the quantitative analysis of the data which is in line with the aim of the study. The major conclusion is derived from how operators of hypermarkets of the retail industry and other relevant stakeholders perceived retailing innovative ambience and its relationship with customer perception. Specifically store layout positively and significantly relates with effective evaluation and customer response. The study recommends that:

1) Hypermarket operators in South-South Nigeria should improve upon their business environment with innovative facilities so as to influence customer perception.

2) Operators of hypermarkets should ensure proper landscaping or aesthetic design of the environment such that it will be appealing to the customers that will enhance patronage by ways of positive perception.

3) Managers of hypermarkets should ensure affective evaluation of customer response in their market space so as to enhance patronage and memorable shopping experience.

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