STORE LAYOUT AND CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF HYPERMARKETS IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study aimed at ascertaining the relationship between Store layout and Customers' Perception. The geographical scope of the study is South-South Nigeria, with customers as unit of analysis. The population of this study comprised of all customers from four (4) hypermarkets in South-South states of Nigeria, which are: SPAR (Port Harcourt), SPAR (Calabar), Shoprite (Asaba) and Next Cash and Carry (Port Harcourt). Purposive sampling technique was used to select three hundred fifty two (352) respondents from the population of the study. This was achieved using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table (1970). Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC) was used to analyze the multivariate statistics. Analysis of the results revealed that retail ambience innovation correlate customer perception. The concluded that there is significant relationship between store layout and customers' perception measures. Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made: Hypermarket operators in south-south Nigeria should improve their business environment with innovative facilities. So as to influence customers' perception. Operators of hypermarkets should ensure proper store layout such as landscaping, window displays, store entrance and aesthetic design of the environment such that it will be appealing to the customers that will enhance patronage by ways of positive perception.

Keywords: Store Layout, Display, Affective Evaluation, Cognitive Evaluation, Customer Response, Customers Perception

INTRODUCTION
In the past, the retail industry in Nigeria has played a vital role in meeting the needs of the society by stocking and displaying variety of merchandize and exchanging goods and services that fullfil consumer needs with huge sales volume, profitability and market share. That was the era of sellers-market when globalization, sophistication, advanced technology, education and skill have not influenced consumers' needs, demand, taste and preference. Presently, the retail industry is facing new challenges with more intensified competition, and sustenance in the market place is a major problem facing the industry due to the increased level of sophistication of consumers, advanced information technology, greater customer choice and expectation. This has in turn affected sales volume, profitability and market share on the retailing industry. Consequently, consumers are not just shopping for goods and services, rather they are shopping for better value propositions and bundle of experience because the mere presence of goods and services is no longer enough to give unforgettable experience to the consumers. The shopping experience includes, among others, relaxation time, entertainment, fun time, enjoyable experience, social and interacting place. This shopping experience can only be achieved by customers if retail store operators could improve on the existing ambience and also put in place new features, designs and facilities that could positively impact customers' perception towards their stores. Thus, there is need for retail operators of hypermarkets to have indepth knowledge of their consumers' behaviour, particularly their preferences and perception about store ambience. Hence, this study focused on retail ambience innovation and customers' perception of hypermarkets in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Store Layout and Customers' Perception of Hypermarkets in the South-South, Nigeria

Operational Conceptual Framework
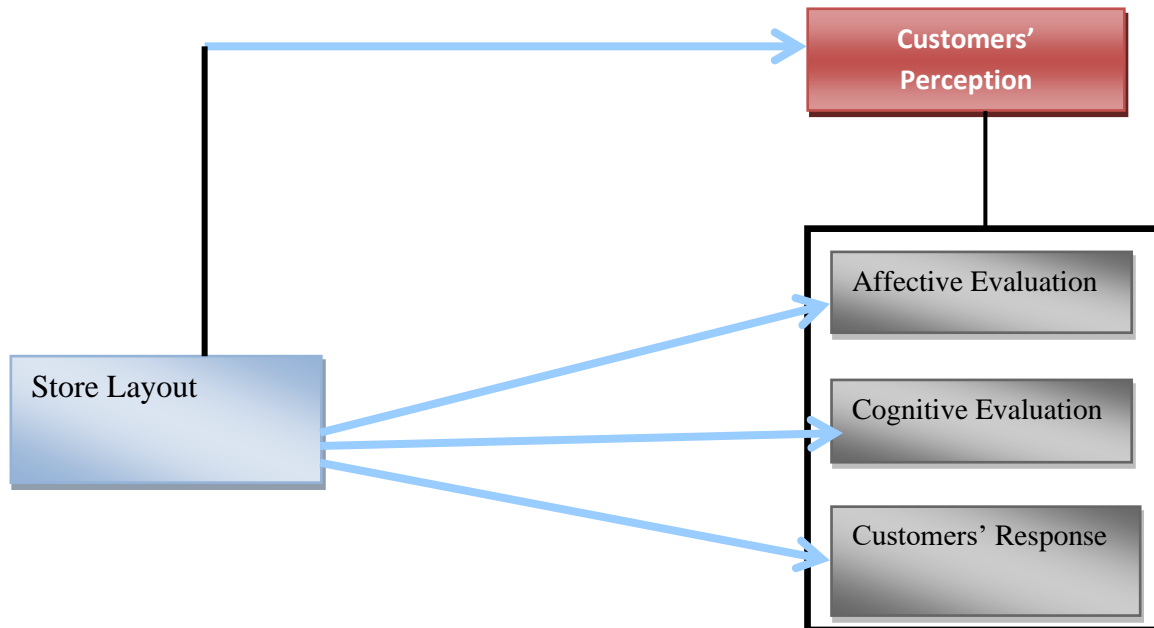
$H_{o1:}$ There is no significant relationship between store layout and affective evaluation of hypermarkets in South-South, Nigeria.

$H_{o2:}$ There is no significant relationship between store layout and cognitive evaluation of hypermarkets in South-South, Nigeria.

$H_{o3:}$ There is no significant relationship between store layout and customers' response to hypermarkets in South-South, Nigeria.

Store Layout and Affective Evaluation

Store layout is a key factor driving consumers' evaluation and response in the retail store. The layout of a retail store has been found to significantly impact a retailer's overall performance through its influence on information processing, purchasing intentions and attitude towards the retail establishment. Scholars on retailing submit that retailers' store layout results in greater consumer elaboration and more positive consumer outcomes (Griffith, 2005). Store layout is the ease of user movement through the store to provide maximum exposure of goods and attractive display (Marketing Glossary, 2007). These displays include doors, merchandise placement, sheet or sensation, music, check-out counters, interior decorating, staff attitudes, lighting and location of the loading facilities (Levy *et al*, 1995). These facilities evoke response from an induced or actual customer.   But when if turns otherwise effective evaluation will not take place in the retail store layout. Hence, store layout can facilitate the efficient flow of shoppers and decrease the feeling of crowding as well as eliminating the psychological costs of negative feelings and diminish price perceptions (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999; Titus & Everett, 1995). Levy and Weitz (2009) posited that store layouts are created to guide customers through the store and helps them in locating and finding information about products. They established that a good store layout can make shopping more fun and more enjoyable by decreasing stress and evoking a positive effect (Yoo, *et al.,* 1998; Baker, *et al.,* 2002). In the same vein, a good layout can make store merchandise more impressive, giving the impression that more products are displayed than actually exist (Morales, *et al.,* 2005). A good store layout can facilitate the efficient flow of shoppers and decrease the feeling of crowding as well as eliminating the psychological costs of negative feelings and diminish price perceptions (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999; Titus & Everett, 1995). 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 behaviour (Russell & Pratt, 1980; Russell, *et al.*, 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 environments revealed 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 behaviours were related only to the pleasure and arousal dimensions in a retail setting.

Store layout and Cognitive Evaluation

Marketing Glorsary (2007) explained that store layout is the ease of user movement through the store to provide maximum exposure of goods and attractive display which includes merchandise placement, shelf orientation, music, checkout counters, interior decorating, staff attitude, lighting and location of the loading facilities (Levy *et al*, 1995). It is premised upon the above points that store layout is being positioned as a critical factor driving consumer elaboration and response in retailing. It is unassuming that the layout of a retail store has been found to significantly impact a retailer's overall performance through its influence on information processing, purchase intentions and attitude towards the retail establishment. Dabholkar *et al* (1996) note that a retail store experience involves more than a non-retail services experience in terms of customers negotiating their way through a store, finding the merchandise they want, interacting with several store personnel along the way, and returning merchandise, all of which influence customers' evaluations of service quality. It is on this note that Griffith (2005) posited that store layout results in greater consumer elaboration and more positive consumer outcomes. Kumar and Kim (2014) emphasized the usefulness of retail store layout to customers' cognitive evaluation. Firstly, the authors state that retail store represents a brand itself that strengthens the customer's emotional and rationale relationships. The authors pointed out that cognitive process takes place when the purchasing is easier and customers have the impression and also a positive opinion towards a store. This assertion is measured by several factors like: social factors associated with store employees such as service and appearance. Secondly, the interior designs associated with music, colour, temperature, lighting, scent, cleanliness, flooring, try rooms and display in the stores. Thirdly the exterior displace associated with the facility such as landscaping, storefront, entrance, window display, parking space, and facade. Fourthly, technological inclusions associated with information and communication technology, visual reality, electronic payment, mobile Apps, scan and go technology, serve-check-out technology, and smart-self technology, merchandise cues related to the type of goods sold, as well as the quality of goods sold. Furthermore, Barata and Halim (2016) emphasized that cognitive evaluation is divided into three aspects: first, product components which has to do with consistency of product quality and product range; second, the store service which has to do with service speed; third, the promotional component which consists of the relationship with the supplier. Relating store layout to cognitive evaluation, two key aspects of cognitive evaluation are emphasized. First, cognitive evaluation towards store and the cognitive evaluation towards merchandise. Kumar and Kim (2014) stated that if the consumers' belief depict that a store has good items of merchandise, it will affect the cognitive evaluation towards the merchandise and if the consumer believes that a store has social cues, interior cues, and a good exterior cues and technological cues, then it will affect the cognitive evaluation towards the store.

Store Layout and Customers' Response

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 human 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, *et al.,* (2011) emphasized that layout in the retail store industry consists of three principles names: 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. Response is associated with the psychological reactions such as attitudes and behavioural reactions of consumers (Bagozzi, 1986). The retail atmosphere has been found to influence customer behavioural 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). Store layout is the design of a store's floor space and the placement of items within the store. Store layout is an important variable affecting consumer behaviour and a critical determinant towards the creation of store image. Well-designed layouts are extremely important because they strongly influence in-store traffic patterns, shopping atmosphere, shopping behaviour, and operational efficiency (Vrechopoulos *et al*, 2004). Clank (2003) observed that taking a more strategic approach to store layout can reap big rewards by boosting sales, increasing customer loyalty and ultimately increasing turnover. It has been established in this study, that store layout can ease user movement through the store to provide maximum exposure of goods and attractive display. Kumar and Kim (2014) and Barata and Halim (2016) emphasized approach behaviour which includes positive response of customers towards a store environment. Chen and Hsieh (2011) observed that approach behaviour in the form of customers' response has a positive interaction, impression, and positive identification towards a store that makes a person want to go back to the store again. Kactcheva (2006) posited that store layout of a good store is important as it can increase the value of the store. Holey (2012) emphasized that a store value is determined by consumers from the atmosphere of the store. In the retailing stores, response to store stimuli is often referred to as approach or avoidance behaviour. Approach is the desire to remain in the store, continue shopping and willingness to stay for relatively long periods. In contrast, avoidance behaviours are associated with negative reactions including a desire to leave the store and not to return (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). It is unarguable that negative customers' experience in store settings can negatively affect the response of customer towards the store. It is not in all items that store layout positively influences customers' response.

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 environments (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 behaviour. This implies that the 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 consumers purchase behaviour (Baker, *et al*, 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). They also emphasized that retail store designs that shape a retail space create or alter consumers' mood and impact consumers' behavioural response (Markin, *et at.,* 1976). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) applied the SOR framework to a retail store setting and test the link between organism and response valuables. The authors concluded 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 behaviour. 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) argued that store 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.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The research employed survey research design. Survey research design is a non-experimental survey design involving a single observation of the sample population with the observations descriptively represented.

Population of the Study
The population of this study comprised of all customers from four (4) hypermarkets in South-South states of Nigeria, which are: SPAR (Port Harcourt), SPAR (Calabar), Shoprite (Asaba) and Next Cash and Carry (Port Harcourt). Information obtained from the traffic flow device of each of the hypermarkets outlets revealed that over 1000 shoppers were recorded on daily bases. Therefore 1000 active customers were randomly selected from each of the hypermarket making a total target population four thousand (4000).

List of Hypermarkets in South-South Nigeria

S/N	Name of hypermarkets	Rives State (PH)	Cross River (Calabar)	Delta State (Asaba)	Total
1.	Spar	1000			1000
2.	Spar		1000		1000
3.	Next cash and carry	1000			1000
4.	Shoprite			1000	1000
	Total	2000	1000	1000	4000

Source: Research Desk information from traffic flow device of various hypermarkets used for the study, 2019

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques
The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, since the study was customer-based. Therefore, to determine the sample size of the study Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table was applied. Therefore, the sample size of the study was denoted by S=352. The Krejcie and Morgan's sample size calculation was based on P=0.05, where the probability of committing type 1 error is less than (<) 5% or $P < 0.05$.

Instrument for Data Collection
Instrumentation is the process of creating the instrument. In research, the term instrument means any device that a researcher uses to collect information with regards to conducting a study. Example of instrument include questionnaire and interview schedule.

Method of Data Analysis
This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data that were generated. This study used Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) as a suitable analytical tool.

Results
H$_{01}$: There was no significant relationship between store layout and affective evaluation of hypermarkets

Store Layout and Affective Evaluation

Correlations

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

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

Source: Survey data, 2019

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The result in the table 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 level of significance.

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 as stipulated by Irving (2005) cited in Ahiazu and Asawo (2016), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis. This was as, the r value obtained from our SPSS computed output was higher than 0.20 i.e. r = 0.702 is higher than 0.20. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between store layout and affective evaluation of hypermarkets in south-south region of Nigeria.

H₀₂: There was no significant relationship between store layout and cognitive evaluation of hypermarkets

Store Layout and Cognitive Evaluation

Correlations

Variables		Store Layout	Cognitive Evaluation (CE)
Store Layout	Pearson Correlation	1	.407**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	341	341
Cognitive Evaluation (CE)	Pearson Correlation	.407**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	341	341

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

Source: Survey data, 2019

The result in table 4.27 shows that store layout correlates with cognitive evaluation (r = 0.407, p< 0.001). This shows a high correlation indicating a normal relationship. The relationship that exists between store layout and cognitive evaluation is shown to be significant at 0.01 level of significance.

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 alternative hypothesis. This was as, the r value obtained from our SPSS computed output was higher than 0.20 i.e. r = 0.407 is higher than 0.20. Hence, there is a significant relationship between store layout and cognitive evaluation of hypermarkets in south-south region of Nigeria.

H₀₃: There was no significant relationship between store layout and customers' response?

Store Layout and Customers' response

Correlations

Variables		Store Layout	Customers' response
Store Layout	Pearson Correlation	1	.572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	.572**	341
Customers' response	Pearson Correlation	.000	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.432	
	N	341	341

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: Survey data, 2019
The result in the table 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 level of significance.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 ($r \geq 0.20$) is the yardstick for rejecting the null hypotheses, based on these 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 alternative hypothesis. This was as, the r value obtained from our SPSS computed output was higher than 0.20 i.e. $r = 0.572$ is higher than 0.20. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between store layout and customers response of hypermarkets in south-south region of Nigeria.

There is no relationship between store layout and affective evaluation

Null hypothesis seven ($H0_7$) examined the extent of the relationship between store layout and affective evaluation. The result in table 4.26 revealed that there is a significant relationship between store layout and affective evaluation ($r = 0.702$, $p = 0.001$). The outcome of the results signified a very high correlation indicating a normal relationship. The relationship that exist between store layout and affective evaluation is thereforeshown to be significant at 1.01, level of significance.

The findings are in line with the results obtained by Yoo *et al* (1998) and Baker *et al* (2002) established that well build store layout can make shopping more fun and more enjoyable by decreasing the stress and evolving a positive effect.

Null hypotheses eight (Ho_8) examined the extent store layout influenced cognitive evaluation. The result of the test of hypothesis eight indicates that store layout correlates with cognitive evaluation ($r = 0.407$, $p = 0.001$). This showed a high correlation of a normal relationship. The relationship that exists between store layout and cognitive evaluation is revealed to be significant at 0.01, significance level. These findings are consistent with the theories of Kumar and Kim (2014), who stated that if a customer belief depict that a store has good items of merchandise, it will affect the cognitive evaluation towards the merchandise and also if the customer believes that a store has an appropriate store layout, then it will affect the cognitive evaluation towards the store layout.

Null hypotheses nine (Ho_9) states that there is no relationship between store layout and customer response of hypermarkets in south- south Nigeria. The result showed a significant relationship between store layout and customers response ($r = 0.572$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates a high correlation showing a strong relationship. The relationship that exists between store layout and customers' response is shown to be 0.01, significance level. It is in line with Bakata and Halim (2016), who emphasized that approach behaviour which includes responds of customers toward a store environment is characterized with the store designs. It is also in line with Chen and Hisleh (2011) who stated that approach behaviour in form of customer response was a positive interaction, impression and positive identification toward a store that make a customer repeat purchases in the store.

CONCLUSIONS
The findings of the study were based on the results from the quantitative analyses of the data which was in line with the aim of the study. The major conclusion was derived from how operators of hypermarkets of the retail industry and other relevant stakeholders perceived store layout and its relationship with customers' perception.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the implications of the study outcomes, the following recommendations are made:
1)   Hypermarket operators in south-south Nigeria should improve their business environment with innovative facilities. So as to influence customers' perception.

2)   Operators of hypermarkets should ensure effective technological inclusions in the business environment to ensure proper checks in the business place.

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