

SPATIAL LAYOUT AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT**¹Chukundah, Tutah Tonye and ²Mekuri-Ndimele, Joy Adanma (Ph.D)****¹Department of Marketing, ²Department of Office and Information Management,
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Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria****Abstract**

Our study on spatial layout and customer patronage of restaurants covered entire fifteen registered restaurants in Port Harcourt (Finelib.com 2018). The study adopted descriptive survey design with questionnaire as major instrument for data collection. Purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at a representative sample of three hundred for the study. The questionnaire was validated by experts from the study area of interest, for face and content validity, and test re-test approach used for reliability of the instrument, and data obtained subjected to reliability test via Product moment correlation to arrive at 0.89 coefficient considered reliable enough. The questionnaire were self-administered by the researchers through drop – and – pick method to selected customers of the targeted restaurants. Data collected were collated and subjected to statistical analysis. The researchers used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 to analyze the data, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient for hypotheses test did indicate that there is a relationship between spatial layout and customer patronage of restaurants. Based on the results of the study, it was held that spatial layout is significant to customer brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt. There is significant relationship between restaurant spatial layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt. Restaurant spatial layout has significant relationship with customer loyalty. Consequently, the following recommendations were made: Restaurant atmospherics in terms of spatial layout should be taken care of to having well-arranged seating, well-spaced and conducive atmosphere cozy enough to provide customer satisfaction. Owners of restaurants and managers should pay attention to moderating variables such as good communication with customers, giving prompt attention, being courteous to avoid losing customers and unfavorable words of mouth. Restaurant operators must not lose sight of good design, quality furniture, ensuring that their restaurants get latest designs, very clean to attract customers, as brand choice, retained and loyal. Emphasis should not just be limited to building customers, restaurants should lay much emphasis, re-strategize by paying attention to retaining customers, building good customer relations to having loyal customers and advocates.

Keywords: Spatial Layout, Customer Patronage, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Choice, Repeat Visit, Customer Loyalty

Introduction**Background of the Study**

One important element that interest the secretary is spatial layout, which is associated with complementary services equipment, the design and arrangement of office in carrying out secretarial duties. It will interest the office and information manager as well as marketers to give attention to restaurants service equipment such as tables and chairs, including the space provided for easy entry and exit. Walfield and Blodgeth (2005) noted that the arrangement of service equipment, including the provision of space among them is for easy movement of employees and customer alike. This is because a visitor or client will feel much welcomed if provided seat to feel at home visiting an office than being kept standing and unwelcomed. Hence, it is important for organizations, including hospitality entities like restaurants, to manipulate the spatial layout effectively as to enhance customer satisfaction and increase repeat business (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). An important goal for restaurant management is to create and maintain a satisfying environment to influence customers to want to stay as long as possible. Prior research suggests

that the length of time that customers will desire to stay in the restaurant setting, and whether they will patronize, revisit the restaurant, is in part a function of their satisfaction with the spatial layout, since an effective and well managed restaurant spatial layout not only enhances customer dining experience but also help employees to serve customers in a better way. It makes customer and serving staff movement easy.

McEnaney (2014) observed that service organizations are more aware than ever of the cost of replacing an unhappy customer, stressing that an unhappy customer will, on average tell ten others about their unsatisfactory experience. In today's competitive environment, it's more important than ever to work continuously on making the customer experience exceptional. Kivela, Inbakaran, and Reece (2000) argued that restaurant managers need to recognize their dependence on repeat customers, since loyal customers provide predictability, security and prosperity for those involved in the business. Customer patronage therefore leads to improved profits, positive word-of-mouth, more stable customer base, and lower marketing expenditures (McDougall & Levesque 2000, Bowen & Chen 2001, Tsaur, Chiu, & Huang, 2002, Wirtz & Mattila, 2003). It is important to note that customers want things to be easy, have easy thoroughfare, for quick service. They may like your food, but they might want to sit down for a long dinner if better seats are available and well-arranged an option that make it easy for them to dine.

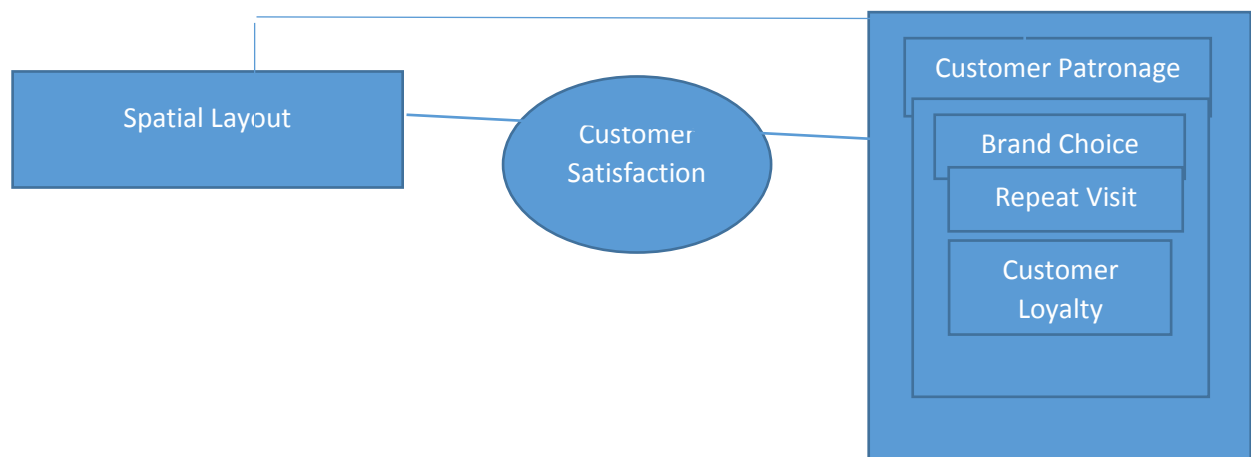
Seating comfort refers to the level of physical comfort desired from the seating quality and it is determined by the physical seat itself as well as the space between the seats (Chan, 2008; Lam, Chan, Fong & Lo, 2011). Wakefield and Blodgett, (1996); Lam et al., (2011) found that seating comfort in casino setting is significant for customers who stay longer in the facility, on the same note spacing and comfort of the seats in classified restaurants was paramount as customers do not just go there to have quick meals, they spend some time in the facility experiencing the environment as they dine. It is often recognized that when customers visit a restaurant, they would like an environment, which would make them feel comfortable and relaxed during the duration of their stay, providing the right comfort, well equipped with good chairs and tables properly arranged and good spacing. For example, the 'space' element refers to the influence of the physical machineries, equipment, furnishing and design on the approach-avoidance decision, and the exchange process within a service (Rasembaum & Massiah, 2011). The association of space and function can be considered as the designscape, which has to be coherent with the restaurant because it helps customers to understand the environment and to know if the place can enable them to fulfill their goals.

Statement of the Problem

Research suggests that most restaurants lose customers not recognizing what makes customer come to them to patronize, restaurant managers or operators should know what makes their restaurant unique and why customers choose a certain restaurant for their dining experiences. Given the nature of service, and customers usually relying on what they see in the environment, the servicescape to be able to judge the restaurants capabilities, the kind of service they are likely to get and to assess their satisfaction before they even make a purchase (Spangenberg, Sprott, Grohmann & Tract, 2006; Ryu & Han, 2010; Egle & Maria, 2012). Consequently, a high degree of switching customer behavior has been observed, which has made the achievement of sustained customer patronage a herculean task for many eateries in Nigeria. The high incidence of customer disloyalty in the food and beverage sector has been attributed among other things to the emergence of new restaurants dotting the landscape of the major cities of Nigeria as well as the inability of the old ones to breathe newness into their service offerings. This unpalatable situation of low customer patronage is expressed through reduction in number of customers, declining sales revenue and profit, with attendant negative consequences for expansion in the industry and the economy as a whole. There is worry that if the growing customer disloyalty is not addressed through some strategies, then the restaurant sub-sector is in great danger.

Marketing scholars argue that the problem of low patronage of restaurants may be attributed to the quality of the servicescape elements such as spatial layout. However, these are postulations that are yet to be empirically ascertained. However, in the current competitive environment, where most restaurants have similar facilities, the survival of restaurants depends on delivery of quality service resulting on servicescape put in place for customers' contentment (Moshin & Lockyer, 2010). Interestingly, there are investigation on servicescape element such as spatial layout as antecedents of customer patronage in previous studies Durna, Dedeoglu, and Balikcioglu, (2015), Bogicevic, (2014), Sahoo, and Pillai, (2017), Smith, (2018), but these surveys concentrated their focus on hotels, banking, airlines and hospitals. Indeed, there is limited knowledge on the influence of spatial layout on customer patronage in the context of restaurants in Port Harcourt the Rivers State capital. This has created void in the literature that needs to be bridged. In the light of the above, this study is undertaken to investigate spatial layout and customer patronage, drawing our empirical assessment of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researchers' Conceptualization, 2020.

Purpose of Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate influence of spatial layout on customer patronage of restaurants. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the relationship between spatial layout and customer brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt.
2. Examine the relationship between spatial layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt.
3. Establish the relationship between spatial layout and customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

To achieve the objective of the study the following questions were highlighted:

1. What relationship exists between spatial layout and customer brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt?
2. How significant is spatial layout to customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt?
3. What is the relationship between spatial layout and customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt?

Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses stated in null form, acceptance or rejection of which would help to authenticate the findings of the study.

Ho₁: Spatial layout is not significant to customer brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between restaurant spatial layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt.

H₀₃: Restaurant spatial layout has no significant relationship with customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt

Significance of the Study

The great interest in this study is its ability to unravel influence of spatial layout on patronage of restaurants

The study would be of immense benefit to restaurant operators and management, as well as their customers, in that restaurants are better exposed to offering quality product and pleasurable atmosphere, good sitting arrangements to their clients or customers as to remain competitive. And customers now can enjoy pleasant atmosphere that puts them in an optimistic mood, and feeling at home. The study also would benefit other researchers on similar study being rich in literature of knowledge, would be consulted or referenced to as source of knowledge. The government would benefit greatly from the study as they now tend to show much concern to providing needed quality service to publics, ensuring societal wellbeing in terms of good road network and layouts for free flow of traffic. The general public, both travelers and tourist would benefit greatly from the study as they are now better informed on where to eat considering their comfort in terms of cosy environment, well ventilated, comfortable chairs, well arranged, its beauty of form, safety and indeed choice place to be.

Scope of the Study

The study subject scope covered spatial layout and customer patronage of restaurants in Port Harcourt. The content scope include: spatial layout as predictor variable as well as customer brand choice, repeat visit, and customer loyalty dimensions of customer patronage as criterion variables. The unit scope include only staff and customers to registered fifteen restaurants identified as: Genesis Group, Jeveniks Resturant, Ororo Resturant and Bar, Pepperoni Foods Limited, Sundry Foods, The Red Coval, Veroz Resturant, Chef Ben Aibee, De Essence Resturant, Exodus Café, Krunchee Food, Kusina Karaoke Bar and Resturant, Salt and Pepper Resturant and Bar, Sok Resturant, The Grub Hut Port Harcourt (Finelib.com 2018).

The geographical scope focused on the fifteen restaurants located at metropolitan cities of Obio Akpor and Port Harcourt cities in Rivers State, the garden city of Nigeria, harboring people from all works of life.

Conceptual Review

Spatial Layout

One aspect of servicescape, spatial layout in restaurants physical environment (Wall & Berry, 2007) may affect customers' physical comfort and movement. On the contrary, Voon, Chitra, and Kueh, (2009) found that servicescape had relatively small impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of the restaurant customers. Even so, Altomonte and Schiavon (2014), suggest that the design aspect of physical surrounding cannot be regarded as a strong condition that could create a sense of belonging for customers. Siu, Wan and Dong (2012), found in hospital setting that design condition has no causal impact on patients' trust. Trust will only be built when the expectations of customers are met by the provider, which allows people to transact business under favourable circumstances (Suki, 2011). One possible reason is that, unlike other industries, the focus of a hospital is mainly on providing good quality medical services, and it is not from the creative design aspect that is said to attract customers. Most of the hospital built environment has a similar context of design and layout, but in their of creative design, hospital management strive to manage the spatial arrangement that can result in better movement of patients and employees.

Spatial layout in restaurants actually refers to the way in which equipment, facility and furnishings are arranged, the size and shape of these items, and the spatial relationships among them. It is the design and arrangement of services equipment, including the provision of space among them for easy movement (Wakefield & Blodgett, 2005). One of the most important tool service providers uses to offer customers wonderful experience especially restaurant business is spatial

layout. When a customer experiences positive emotions in a service encounter, it will lead them to stay with the same service provider and spread positive word of mouth (Jang & Namkung, 2009). In this context, customer emotions and satisfaction with the service encounter play an important role in predicting behavioural intentions (Clemes, Gan, & Ren, 2011; Ladhari, 2009). Service environment therefore is one of the major determinants of consumers' loyalty to a particular services firm (Russell & Ward, 2000). Even so, the level of comfort derivable from a service outlet, as well as the longevity of time to be spent therein by customers, depends on the spatial layout of the service environment (Awasthi & Surivastava, 2014). For instance, the effective layout and functionality will provide for entry and exit and at the same time make ancillary areas like restrooms more accessible and this in turn creates a positive impression among the restaurant customers which leads to customer satisfaction (Harris & Goode, 2010), Baker and Cameron, (1996) and Kim, Ok, and Canter, (2010).

Spatial layout of the physical surroundings referred to as the way in which objects for example machinery, equipment, and furnishings are arranged within the restaurant environment, which should not be left to chance, as it is one essential determinant factor of consumer loyalty to a particular restaurant (Russell & Ward, 2000). The comfortability of a customer in a service point depends much on the spatial layout of the physical surrounding (Awasthi & Surivastava, 2014). Sui, et al., (2012) state that a well design layout like convenience access to customers facilities, will enhance the perception of customers and increase the percentage of repetitive customers (Liu & Jang, 2009) where the accommodation layout for comfortable movement positively associated with emotions of customers (Ariffin et al., 2012). Spatial layout that makes people feel constricted may have a direct effect on customer quality perceptions, excitement levels, and indirectly on their desire to return. While an interesting and effective layout may also facilitate fulfillment of pleasure needs (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Kim, et al., 2010). Customers who are comfortable should experience more positive affective states (Kim, et al., 2010). Creating dining environments that make customers feel comfortable is a key goal of designers and operators. Seating comfort is likely to be a particularly salient issue for customers in the upscale restaurant context where customers may sit for a number of hours. Seat comfort can be influenced by the physical seat itself as well as the space between the seats. Some seats may be uncomfortable because of their design (for instance, hard benches without back support) or condition (deteriorating or wet). Seats may be also uncomfortable because of their proximity to other seats. Customers may physically and psychologically feel uncomfortable if they sit too close to the customers next to them (Barker & Pearce, 1990; Ryu & Jang, 2008). Previous research related to perceived crowding suggested that cramped seating quarters were likely to be perceived as displeasing and of poor quality (Eroglu & Machleit, 1990, 2005; Egle & Maria, 2012). Therefore, comfortable seats with ample space might reduce the feeling of being crowded.

According to the study made by Zijlstra and Mobach (2011), design and layout should be focused on maximizing the positive and meaningful impact for the customer. When it comes to spatial layout, the crowd is one of the most important aspects. Aghazadeh, (2005), posits that the first functionality of layout is to control the flow of traffic through the place, and that three points have to be taken into account. First, the circulation: in a restaurant context, it should encourage the circulation of customers through the different areas of the restaurant. Second, the coordination: it combines goods and space in order to suggest customers' needs. And third, the convenience, which consists in arranging items in a way that should create a degree of convenience for both customers and employees. Zijlstra and Mobach (2001) add that the layout impacts on queuing time, customers' satisfaction and behaviour and also sales rate (Fitzsimons & Fitzsimons, 2006 cited in Zijlstra & Mobach, 2001). From a restaurant's point of view, a functional layout serves the store functions and it should also be designed to support its users. Managing the space, the layout, the signalization, and the design should be one of the main priorities of restaurants, because it can illustrate the restaurant's function (Zijlstra & Mobach, 2001) and be used as a differentiator among competitors (Bitner, 1992).

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage has been measured by various authors in different dimensions, including store traffic flow (Engle et al, 1996); willingness, word-of-mouth and repurchase (Baker et al, 2002); repeat purchase, customer retention and customer referrals (Awah, 2015); and customer satisfaction and referrals (Ogbuji et al, 2016). Our dimensions of customer patronage include: Customer brand choice, repeat visit and loyalty. Customer patronizes their brand choice restaurant, revisit and are loyal, which helps business to improve brand image. Restaurants that are customers brand choice has already won trust of loyal customers, they are more likely to share positive experience than new customers. This eventually helps the restaurant to retain more customers and improve customer loyalty as well as brand loyalty.

Customer Brand Choice

Brand choice is positively related to customer satisfaction as happy customers consistently favor the brands that meet their needs. Customers display their brand choice of restaurants by preferring and purchasing its products or services exclusively, Brand choice can also be regarded as an individual's attitude towards a set of objects, typically reflected in an explicit decision-making process. Research shows that the more attention a product receives, the more likely it is to be chosen. Most of the research concerning selection of a restaurant usually are "...based on identification of determinant attributes" (Bojanic 2007). To Upadhyay, Sharma, and Singh, (2009) the most important influences on the choice of dine-out units are hygienic factors, including cleanliness of the restaurant, food, china and cutlery, service personnel, toilet and lavatory and kitchen (Aksoydan 2007). Whereas a study (Baek, Hamand, & Yang, 2006) that surveyed college students of Korea and Philippines revealed Menu Price as the most important attribute. Next to follow, broadly were food related factors, service and hygiene related factors. A study of senior tourists suggests that display of menu was considered the most important determinant while on holiday (Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003), whereas, an online survey of 685 seniors revealed that two dimensions of attributes that regulate selection of a restaurant are: experience and incentives (Knutson, Beck & Elsworth, 2006). Mehta and Maniam (2002) examined consumer preferences towards restaurant in context of leisure, Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) studied selection of restaurants by tourists in Turkey, Kivela et al. (2000) examined consumers' preferences towards restaurants in Hong Kong, Cullen (2005) investigated consumer preferences for Italian and Chinese styled restaurants. Many studies investigated impact of interiors on consumer preferences towards restaurants (Aubert-Gamet 1997; Studies from Anderson and Mossberg (2004) argued that consumer preferences towards restaurants are hierarchical. Many studies have attempted to comprehend consumer preferences towards restaurant by segmenting them on the basis of benefits sought (Auty 1992; Bahn & Granzin 1985; Koo, Tao & Yeung 1999) they came up with five tips that many organizations or establishments use to build customers patronage.

i. Build good personal relationship with your customer: This is a strategy aimed at cordiality. Don't just aim at your customer's purse or pocket, rather render quality services that will truly satisfy their need and then back that up with a personal touch that shows you are interested in their welfare. When you do this, they will come to consider you as a friend instead of a salesman that is after their money. Remember that everyone craves for attention and recognition. Don't wait for them to ask for it. Give them attention, make them feel special. Treat them as friends. Hence, research has shown that about 80% of customers who complain are just seeking for attention, not that they actually have a serious issue with the producer or service they are complaining about. Don't wait for such customer to ask for attention, give it to them cheerfully, you can be assured they will return for more.

ii. Be courteous to customers: These entails to treat each client as a king. Believe it or not, without their patronage, your business is as good as dead. Also note that an unsatisfied customer can cost you so much in terms of bad publicity. Kalu (1998) agreed that a lost customer can hardly be regained. He or she can make you lose potential income by discouraging others from doing business with you, unfortunately, you may not be given an opportunity to define yourself

before such potential customers pass a vote of no confidence on you and your business. Hence, do all within your power to treat each customer with respect, kindness and offer extras as much as you can afford.

iii. Business Integrity: This is your pre-test asset as a business owner. Because, it deals relies with clients honestly and insist that your employee's do likewise. Never make a promise that you cannot keep. Always keep your promise even if it requires a sacrifice to keep your word. This will win your customers trust and make them have confidence in you.

iv. Reward clients patronage: These device is a means of compensating client who patronage your business often. Make them feel they are special because indeed they are special to you. They are the ones that give your business stability. As there will be discount and if possible render some additional services to such consistent customer without demanding for payment. This will enshrine you to their hearts. Everyone loves free things, especially free food. To keep your customers coming back again and again, sometimes you need to remind them of what they liked about your restaurant in the first place. Giving an incentive is a good way to remind them, and also entice them to bring a friend to your restaurant. If the friend has a good time at your restaurant, and likes your food, they might start coming in as well. Incentives like coupons or freebies, such as "buy 1, get 1" are a good way to entice them to your restaurant, especially if your competitors aren't offering anything similar. Just be sure you measure your success rate and end the promotion if you aren't seeing measurable gains.

v. Add value to the society: This in all dealing is embedded on always seek for a way to add value to the society, as this pay huge dividend on the long run. Human beings are intelligent they know the difference between a business man who adds value and the one that only seeks for profit.

Interestingly, in restaurant business, the brand name, service or product offerings of the restaurant remain unique feature that distinguishes the restaurant from competitors. Branding ultimately works as a signal. It allows consumers to quickly recognize a product as one they are familiar with or one they like. It acts as a memory cue, allowing customers or consumers to retrieve relevant information from memory. This information may be about past experience of the brand, brand perceptions or brand associations. The information we have stored about brands is crucial in guiding our decisions. Brands that are recognized more quickly and easily are liked more and ultimately chosen more (Winkielman, Schwarz, Reber, & Fazendeiro, 2000). They maintained that brand memory, or recognition can be measured with a high degree of accuracy using speeded response, visual search procedures. This test requires participants to search for an item within a display and make a physical response as fast as possible. By recording both accuracy and response time, the technique is a highly sensitive measure of recognition; it measures automatic behaviour, which is not likely to be under conscious control and thus avoids many of the pitfalls of traditional consumer research.

Customer Repeat Visit

Customers can be divided into new customers and repeat customers. Restaurant owners and managers are obviously concerned about attracting new customers. However, the focus on continued growth often causes them to neglect what is arguably the most important part of sustained success: repeat customers. Researchers at Harvard have found that if you increase repeat visits by 5%, you can raise your profits anywhere from 25 to 125%. Other studies show that the cost of acquiring new customers is five times the cost of retaining an existing customer, though some experts say it may be even higher — at 6 to 7 times the cost. Here's how to create repeat customers for your restaurant. Attracting new ones is very important, but since over 60% of customers of a successful restaurant are repeat ones, it is evident that much attention and focus be placed on repeat visit satisfying customers. This is because it takes satisfied customer to repeat or come again. Having or bringing in new customers is important, but what's even more important is turning those new customers into repeat visitors (Ryn, 2018). Repeat visit is the backbone of customer retention. It measures the percentage of customers willing to make a second purchase from the restaurant. Usually associated with increasing frequency of customers'

visits. Measuring your repeat purchase rate is an excellent way of evaluating how well your retention strategy is actually working. The higher this metric is, the more willing customers are to return to your restaurant

Turning a customer into a repeat one is more an art than a science. It's a combination of factors that produces a wonderful dining experience. This experience, which can be sumptuous meal, good chair and table arrangement with associated comfort, is what makes your restaurant memorable and can turn a one-time visitor into a valuable, long-term customer. Kotler (2013) further stated that the necessity for a customer to repeat purchases would be backed-up by utmost satisfaction or utility gained from bought items or consumed. Customer repeat visit is usually a matter of increasing the frequency of a customer's visits, not just once a month on average, the opportunity is to bump that up to two or three times a month. If it's once a week, you want them at least one more time. The answer on how to create repeat customers for your restaurant involves a combination of all of these elements, which tie together to create the experience that your customer will either love or hate. Neglect one, and you may risk your customers not coming back. First and foremost, make sure that your service and food are up to par, quality service with warm welcome smile as well as comfortable seats and then you can focus on everything else.

Customer Loyalty

No doubt, good spatial layout enhances satisfaction and customer loyalty. Customer Loyalty to Oliver (1997) is a deeply held commitment to repeat purchases of a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influence and marketing efforts. Kendrick (1998) proposed a definition of loyalty which includes the variables of purchase frequency and amount spent per order or visit. Bowen and Chen (2001) in their study of the relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction indicated that there is a positive correlation between loyal customers and profitability. We agree strongly with Ryn, (2018) that having or bringing in new customers is important, but what's even more important is turning those new customers into repeat visitors in the face of competitive environment of business. Efforts is geared towards customer loyalty encouraging consumers to shop more consistently, spend a greater share of wallet, and feel positive about a shopping experience, helping attract consumers to familiar brands not just once, but every day of the customer relationship. The spatial layout of a restaurant can be the strategy to having loyal customers. The emphasis is not limiting to having repeat customer, making them loyal, advocates and even partners. Customer loyalty is described as a customer's repeated visitation or repeat purchase behavior while including the emotional commitment or expression of a favorable attitude toward the service provider. It is equally known that loyal customers' visit frequency is higher and they make more purchases than non-loyal customers. They are also less likely to switch to a competitor brand just because of price and other special promotions and bring in new customers through positive word-of-mouth which can sometimes save a huge amount of expenses for advertising (Chiou, Cornelia & Sangphet, 2002). Your customer base will appreciate the flexibility you offer and will remain loyal if they have a good experience. Loyal customers provide strong word-of-mouth, create business referrals, provide references and serve on advisory boards (Bowen & Chen 2001).

Studies have shown that loyal customers can spend up to 67% more on repeat visits to a business, and will often increase their visits as they remain with the loyalty program. The thrust is that loyalty program works, if your customers like the restaurant spatial layout, the service experience, and food, and there's going to be a tangible reward after they've visited X number of times, they'll likely return to that restaurant. A loyalty program is thus is a signal to your customers that you appreciate them. Your customers, in turn, will give you repeat business, because they have that incentive. On the other hand, if your customers come in and feel like they aren't valued, they're not going to return. If they're welcomed, and treated well, they'll feel like family, and they'll want to return. Use their name, if possible, and thank them for their visit. A loyal customer base remains a valuable asset for an organization. It reduces the need to seek new

customers and generates accurate feedback that the restaurant's products and services are meeting the needs of a particular group of people. Moreover, loyal customers buy more, need less information as compared to non-loyal customers and are less likely to switch. They serve as an information source for other customers and also act as part time employees (Bowen & Chen 2001).

Chen (2001) rightly argued that loyalty is determined by the strength of the relationship between relative attitude and repeat patronage and that it has both attitudinal and behavioral elements. The combination of these enable us to distinguish two types of customer loyalty concepts, i.e., loyalty based on inertia, where a brand is bought out of habit merely because this takes less effort and customer will not hesitate to switch to another brand if there is some convenient reason to do so. Hence, consumers could switch brand due to openness to change and associated power of marketing communication, promoting brand switch and changing loyalty status (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Secondly, true brand loyalty, which is a form of repeat purchasing behavior reflecting a conscious decision to continue buying the same brand, which must be accompanied by an underlying positive attitude and a high degree of commitment towards the brand (Beerli, Martin, & Quintana 2004). Interestingly, Dick and Basu (1994) proposed four conditions related to loyalty to include:

1. Loyalty signifies a favourable correspondence between relative and repeat patronage.
2. Latent loyalty is associated with high relative attitude, but low repeat patronage.
3. Spurious loyalty occurs when a consumer frequently purchases a brand but sees no significant difference among brands.
4. No loyalty exists in a category when customers see few differences between alternative brands and there are low repeat purchases.

Gap in Literature Reviewed

Several studies on spatial layout and customer patronage exist. Perrone, (2009) in service settings, noted that the servicescape, the physical environment in which a customer and service provider meet can have a significant effect on what a customer experiences and the subsequent perceptions and behaviour of that customer. Mohammad, and Ahmad, (2012) investigated the attractiveness factors influencing shoppers' satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth in Saudi shopping mall centers. Ali, and Amin, (2014) examined the influence of physical environment on emotions, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in Chinese resort hotel industry. Şahiner, (2016) carried out study with the aim to emphasize the effect of physical environment of interior space on customer's emotions and behavioral intentions at hotel lobbies. Kitambi (2015) studied the impact of physical environment on customer loyalty in Mwanza four star hotels. Kirima, Makopondo, and Mutungi, (2017) carried out study on effect of external hotel design features on customer attraction and retention. Inyanga and Chukundah (2018) carried out study on physical facilities and customer patronage of selected hotels in Port Harcourt. Obinwanne, and Alozie, (2019) carried out study on Interior Design of Hotel Rooms as a Factor Affecting Customer Satisfaction in Hotels. The study focused on hotels operating in Abakiliki, capital of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It's obvious that little or nothing had been done on spatial layout and customer patronage and related work had been on hotels and shopping malls, which is the credence for this study to empirically investigate spatial layout and customer patronage of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Methodology

This study was carried out in Port Harcourt and Obio Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The study adopted the use of descriptive survey design this involved collection of information by administering questionnaire and interviewing a sample of individual. For the purpose of this study, the target population was customers drawn from all the registered fifteen restaurants (Finelib.com 2018) operating in Obio Akpor and Port Harcourt City in Rivers State. Purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at a representative sample for the study. This

technique was used since the exact numbers of the study unit made up of customers of the fifteen restaurants are not known as different customers come in and go. Consequently, proportional sample was derived, in doing that a sample of forty (40) customers of five (5) different restaurants of equal status in all ramification with the fifteen restaurants under investigation were considered for a pilot test, in order to determine an appropriate sample size for the study. The research instrument was administered to them and returned after they had responded to the questions contained therein. Their responses showed a mean of 600 and standard deviation of 54. On a full scale, the researcher wanted a sample size for which the interval estimate of the mean should be within 10. Thus, at 99% level of confidence we have:

Level of Confidence (from confident interval (C.I) estimation of mean or proportion)

$$n = \frac{Z_d^2 S^2}{E^2}$$

Where:

n = required sample size from the accessible population

Zd = for n = 40 being large, Zd is Z-value at the desired level of confidence.

E = tolerance level for required precision.

Z for 99% level of confidence = 2.58

S = 54

E = $10/2 = 5$

Therefore, required sample size (n) =

$$\frac{2.58 \times 54^2}{5^2} = 300$$

By proportional allocation, 20 copies of the research instrument were administered to 20 customers of each of the 15 restaurants considered for this study.

The items used in measuring spatial layout and customer patronage were adopted from several studies: Lin and Mattila (2010), Harris and Ezech (2008), Ryu and Jang (2008), Hightower, Brady and Baker (2002), Parasuraramen, Zeithaml and Barry (1985). Hence, validity of the questionnaire used for this study was made possible by experts from areas of interest, for face and content validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tathan, 2010) thereby ensuring that the questionnaire measured what it was meant to measure. On reliability, was pilot test of the study instrument on 40 participants drawn from five restaurants, asked to rate each item using a 5-point Likert Scale of Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5), and the degree of reliability of the instrument based on adoption of test-re-test method. This involved administering the questionnaire twice to the sampled population used for the study. Data obtained were subjected to reliability test via Product moment correlation coefficient to arrive at 0.89 coefficient considered reliable enough. This means that the questionnaire elicited the same information always from the same set of respondents. The questionnaire were self-administered through drop – and – pick method to selected customers of the targeted restaurants, meeting with the respondents at the time when they came in shopping and dining led to more accurate results, since they still remembered the impact of main factors of the restaurants spatial layout on their patronage. Closed ended questions were presented on a Likert five scale type. The Likert scale is commonly used in business research and applied because it allows participants to provide their perceptions and opinions both in terms of direction (positive or negative) and intensity (degree of agreement or disagreement). The ratings were on a scale of 1 (lowest or least important) to 5 (highest or most important). Additionally secondary data related to restaurants spatial layout and customer patronage were explored. Data collected were collated and subjected to statistical analysis. The researcher used Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 to analyze the data, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient hypotheses test did indicate whether or not there is a relationship between spatial layout and customer patronage of restaurants and if there is, it showed the extent of the relationship and the direction. The correlation coefficient obtained from PPMC was used to analyze the research questions. The hypotheses were tested by testing the significance of r. This is achieved by converting calculated

value of r (r -cal) to t -test statistics. The formula for converting r to t according to Udoh (2003) is:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}}, \text{ where } r \text{ is the calculated coefficient of correlation, } n \text{ is the sample size. This}$$

becomes the calculated value of t . This value is compared with the critical value of t at 0.05 level of significance and 298 (300-2) degree of freedom. If calculated value of t (t -cal) is greater than the critical value of t (t -crit), the hypothesis is rejected otherwise, retained.

Analysis/Discussion

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between spatial layout and customer brand choice to restaurants in Port Harcourt?

Table 4.1: Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Brand Choice

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r -cal
Spatial Layout (X)	300	6051	4035	124893	56725	82251	0.327
Customer Brand Choice (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020.

The data presented in Table 4.1 shows that the correlation coefficient between spatial layout and customer brand choice is 0.327. This value shows that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. This means that the better the spatial layout of a restaurant, the higher the likelihood that customers will make it a brand choice and vice versa. The correlation coefficient of 0.327 indicates that the relationship is low.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between spatial layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt?

Table 4.2: Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Repeat Visit

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r -cal
Spatial Layout (X)	300	6051	5046	124893	87662	103141	0.484
Customer Repeat Visit (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020.

The data presented in Table 4.2 shows that the correlation coefficient between spatial layout and customer brand choice is 0.484. This value shows that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. This means that the better the spatial layout of a restaurant, the higher the likelihood that customers will make repeat visit and vice versa. The correlation coefficient of 0.484 indicates that the relationship is low.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between spatial layout and customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt?

Table 4.3: Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Loyalty

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r -cal
Spatial Layout (X)	300	6051	5692	124893	112722	116249	0.393
Customer Loyalty (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020.

The data presented in Table 4.3 shows that the correlation coefficient between spatial layout and customer loyalty is 0.393. This value shows that a positive relationship exists between the two

variables. This means that the better the spatial layout of a restaurant, the more likelihood that customers will be loyal and vice versa. The correlation coefficient of 0.393 indicates that the relationship is low.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between restaurants Spatial Layout and customers brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 4.4: Test of Significant Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Brand Choice

Variables	N	df	t-cal	t-crit	sig. level	P-value	Decision
Spatial Layout (X)	300	298	5.973	1.968	0.050	0.000	Rejected
Customer Brand Choice (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020

Table 4.4 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between spatial layout and customer brand choice. As shown, calculated value of t (t-cal) is 5.973 while the critical value of t (t-crit) is 1.968 at 298 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.05. Since, t-cal is greater than t-crit, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between spatial condition and customer brand choice of the restaurants. This result agrees with the view by Jang and Namkung (2009) that physical surroundings influence intention to stay in the future. This result implies that improvement in spatial layout did result in corresponding improvement in customer brand choice of restaurants. This result is surprising; one would have expected that since low relationships exist between the two variables, the test of significance would have turned out to be insignificant. The result however confirms the observation of Hole (n.d.) that a very low relationship could be statistically significant as it is in the present hypothesis, if the sample size is large. Hole (n.d.) illustrated that a correlation coefficient of 0.393 should be statistically significant at degree of freedom of 100. Such could have been the case in the present result having a low correlation coefficient of 0.393 with a higher degree of freedom (298).

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between restaurants Spatial Layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 4.5: Test of Significant Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Repeat Visit

Variables	N	df	t-cal	t-crit	sig. level	P-value	Decision
Spatial Layout (X)	300	298	9.548	1.968	0.050	0.000	Rejected
Customer Repeat Visit (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020.

Table 4.5 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between spatial layout and customer repeat visit to a restaurant. As shown, calculated value of t (t-cal) is 9.548 while the critical value of t (t-crit) is 1.968 at 298 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.05. Since, t-cal is greater than t-crit, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between spatial condition and customer repeat visit to a restaurant. The result shows that the relationship was however low. The result implies that improvement in spatial layout of a restaurant results in corresponding improvement in customer repeat visit and vice versa. This result agrees with the view by Jang and Namkung (2009) that physical surroundings influence intention to stay in the future. It furthermore agrees with the view of Ariffin et al (2012) who opined that poor spatial layout makes people feel constricted and may negatively impact customer desire to return. This result implies that improvement in spatial layout did result in corresponding improvement in customer repeat visit to the restaurants, since t-cal value (9.548) is

greater than t-crit (1.968). Interestingly, the results agrees with the view of Sui et al (2012) that a well design layout like convenience access to facilities by customers enhances the perception of customers and increase the percentage of repetitive customers. However, one would have expected that since low relationships exist between the two variables, the test of significance would have turned out to be insignificant. The result also confirms the observation of Hole (n.d.) that a very low relationship could be statistically significant as it is in the present hypothesis, if the sample size is large. Hole (n.d.) illustrated that a correlation coefficient of 0.393 should be statistically significant at degree of freedom of 100. Such could have been the case in the present result having a low correlation coefficient of 0.393 with a higher degree of freedom (298).

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between restaurants spatial layout and customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Table 4.6: Test of Significant Relationship between Spatial Layout and Customer Loyalty

Variables	N	Df	t-cal	t-crit	sig. level	P-value	decision
Spatial Layout (X)	300	298	5.378	1.968	0.050	0.000	Rejected
Customer Loyalty (Y)	300						

Field data, 2020

Table 4.6 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between spatial layout and customer loyalty to restaurants. As shown, calculated value of t (t-cal) is 5.378 while the critical value of t (t-crit) is 1.968 at 298 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.05. Since, t-cal is greater than t-crit, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between spatial condition and customer loyalty to a restaurant. The result shows that the relationship was however low. The result implies that improvement in spatial layout of restaurants results in corresponding improvement in customer loyalty and vice versa. This result agrees with the view that service environment is a determinants of consumers' loyalty to a particular services firm (Russell & Ward, 2000). This result equally agrees with the view of Awasthi and Surivastava (2014) that level of comfort derivable from a service outlet, as well as the longevity of time to be spent therein by customers, depends on the spatial layout of the service environment. The test of hypothesis three shows that the relationship between the two variables, spatial layout and customer loyalty is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This result is equally surprising; one would have expected that since low relationships exist between the two variables, the test of significance would have turned out to be insignificant. The result however confirms the observation of Hole (n.d.) that a very low relationship could be statistically significant as it is in the present hypothesis, if the sample size is large. Hole (n.d.) illustrated that a correlation coefficient of 0.393 should be statistically significant at degree of freedom of 100. Such could have been the case in the present result having a low correlation coefficient of 0.393 with a higher degree of freedom (298).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, it was held that spatial layout is significant to customer brand choice of restaurants in Port Harcourt. There is significant relationship between restaurant spatial layout and customer repeat visit to restaurants in Port Harcourt. Restaurant spatial layout has significant relationship with customer loyalty to restaurants in Port Harcourt. Consequently, the following recommendations were made: Restaurant atmospherics in terms of spatial layout should be taken care of to having well-arranged seating, well-spaced and conducive atmosphere cozy enough to provide customer satisfaction. Owners of restaurants and managers should pay attention to moderating variables such as good communication with customers, giving prompt attention, being courteous to avoid losing customers and unfavorable words of mouth. Restaurant operators must not lose sight of good design, quality furniture, ensuring that their restaurants get

latest designs, very clean to attract customers, as brand choice, retained and loyal. Emphasis should not just be limited to building customers, restaurants should lay much emphasis, re-strategize by paying attention to retaining customers, building good customer relations to having loyal customers and advocates.

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