

Influence of store image on customer satisfaction among supermarkets in Uyo metropolis, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Uduak Emmanuel Joseph*, Fatima Okonofua and Ini Smart Udoh

Department of Marketing, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author. Email: sifonmfonmma@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this study is to investigate the influence of store image on customer satisfaction among supermarkets in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom state. The survey method was adopted. Data were collected through the questionnaire which was administered to 244 respondents who patronized supermarkets within the metropolis. Regression analysis was carried out to test the hypothesis in order to ascertain the influence of store image on customer satisfaction. The Cronbach Alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire which showed 0.866 level of reliability. The result showed that Store Image has a strong positive relationship with customer satisfaction. It was recommended that while retailers should consistently improve on their store attributes through product assortment, store layout, convenience and ease of payment, they could consider other attributes such as the quality of the products being offered, the shelf life of the products, the environmental attributes of the store and the general atmospherics.

Keywords: Customers, customer satisfaction, store attributes, store image, supermarkets.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a store where there is no good parking space, the doorman is unkempt, the salespersons are lazy, and the products are old, dusty and carelessly placed. Such a store may leave the consumers with feelings of regret and dissatisfaction. The decision to patronise a store usually starts with a set of attributes that customers consider important. These attributes may include the level of assortment, store layout, staff responsiveness, convenience and ease of payment. These form the store image. Consumers use these attributes to determine which stores can cater for their needs (Hassan et al., 2010). Polat (2011) defined image as the vision, picture, or impression that is formed in an individual's mind based on the data and information they gather through their interactions with the elements of the organisation. Based on this definition, store image refers to the vision, picture or impression that customers form based on their interaction with elements of the store. The concept of store image covers not only visible attributes but also abstract factors.

The Satisfaction of customers form the foundation of any successful business. It leads to repeat purchase, brand loyalty, and positive word of mouth (Angelova and Zekiri, 2011). It also reduces the price flexibility and the cost of defection. Customer satisfaction refers to the outcome felt by those that have experienced a company's performance which have fulfilled their expectations (Angelova and Zekiri, 2011).

In the early days of retailing, all products generally were fetched by an assistant from shelves behind the merchant's counter while customers waited in front of the counter and indicated the items they wanted. Nowadays, with the establishment of stores like the Supermarkets, the trend has changed to be more of self service (Ellickson, 2015). The term supermarket is loosely used in Nigeria to describe retail establishments found outside the open market set up (Agbonifo et al., 2007). Supermarkets in this study refer to departmentalised, self-service stores that specialize in food and none food items.

The consistent increase in Supermarkets in Uyo has led

to an increase in the level of competition which has also led to an increase in the level of customer expectation for providing services. Store image attributes can influence customers' perception and lead to positive word of mouth, store loyalty, store choice and indeed, a general feeling of satisfaction with the service. Despite these possibilities, some supermarkets are not very careful about the image they project to the public, less attention have been given to image attributes. Some supermarkets have few product assortments offered for sale, unattractive store design/layout, poor staff responsiveness, poor shopping convenience and difficulty in ease of payment, yet they seem not to be bothered about it. This is why this study is carried out to see how this affect their performance in terms of customers' satisfaction.

The objective of this study is to determine the influence of store image on customers' satisfaction with supermarket services in Uyo metropolis. The basic question to be answered here is to what extent does store image impact on customer satisfaction in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State given the facts that similar studies in more developed countries have shown that a relationship exists between store image and customer satisfaction. This study hopes to fill the gap by showing the relationship in a less developed society.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between store image and customer satisfaction

Literature review

The concept of store image became important for the first time when Martineau (1958) talked about the personality of stores. He believed that the most important thing that affects customers' decision is store image or appearance. He believed that store image could be affected by psychological elements as well as functional quality (Naderin, 2012). Martineau (1958) first defined store image as the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional attributes and partly by an aura of psychological attributes. According to Lusch et al. (2011), store image was defined simply as a set of attributes deemed important by consumers. Saraswat et al. (2010) also redefined store image as the symbolic, experiential expression of the manner in which consumers see or visualise a store.

A common thread in these definitions is that store image pertains to the perceptions of consumers about a particular store (Dhurup et al., 2013). From the definitions cited here, there is no universally accepted definition of store image (Visser et al., 2006; Nwulu et al., 2015). Therefore, we can say that store image is a combination of both physical and psychological attributes of a store which affect the feelings of customers, to the extent of leaving him satisfied or dissatisfied.

Store image attributes

A wide variety of store attributes have been discovered to affect shoppers, but no consensus has been reached on how to prioritize these attributes by retailers to maintain customer satisfaction (Visser et al., 2006; Yoo and Chang, 2005). The following store image attributes shall be discussed in line with the focus of this paper.

Product assortment: Assortment here refers to of the availability of new products and varieties of product brands, designs and colours. Kotler and Keller (2005) defined assortment as a set of all products and items a particular seller offers for sale and this consists of various product lines. Even though product assortment varies among retail stores, retailers seek to satisfy customers' needs and customers prefer stores with a wide variety of products (Mazelyte and Razbadauskite, 2010).

Store design/layout: Store layout is the design of a store's floor space and the placement of items within the store (Heap, 2014). Where there is well-mannered layout and creative display, customers tend to engage in unplanned purchases. Therefore, effective and balanced layout ensures increased positive customer experience (Mazelyte and Razbadauskite, 2010). According to Tlapana (2009), good store layouts are extremely important because they strongly increase store visits, and improve in-store traffic patterns, shopping atmosphere, shopping behaviour and operational efficiency. Ghang (2013) stated that the display of items in a store has an important influence on the purchase of the items.

Staff responsiveness: This attribute is evident among staff that show kindness to customers, assisting them on product related information and rendering excellent customer service. Penceliah et al. (2015) define responsiveness as the willingness and readiness of employees to deal with customers' requests, questions, complaints and problems. Staff responsiveness involves a number of elements such as the appearance of sales personnel, sales personnel's willingness to assist customers, the treatment offered to customers, personalised attention and the ability to effectively and efficiently attend to customers' requests.

Convenience: Convenience embodies both convenience of shopping and convenience of location. Convenience of shopping includes the ease of movement within the store and easy search for wanted goods while convenience of location includes the easy entrance and exit from parking lot and store proximity to home or work place (Yoo and Chang, 2005). Retail customer satisfaction is determined by shopping convenience (Rana et al., 2014).

Ease of payment: Ease of payment involves the process of paying money for purchased items without having to be

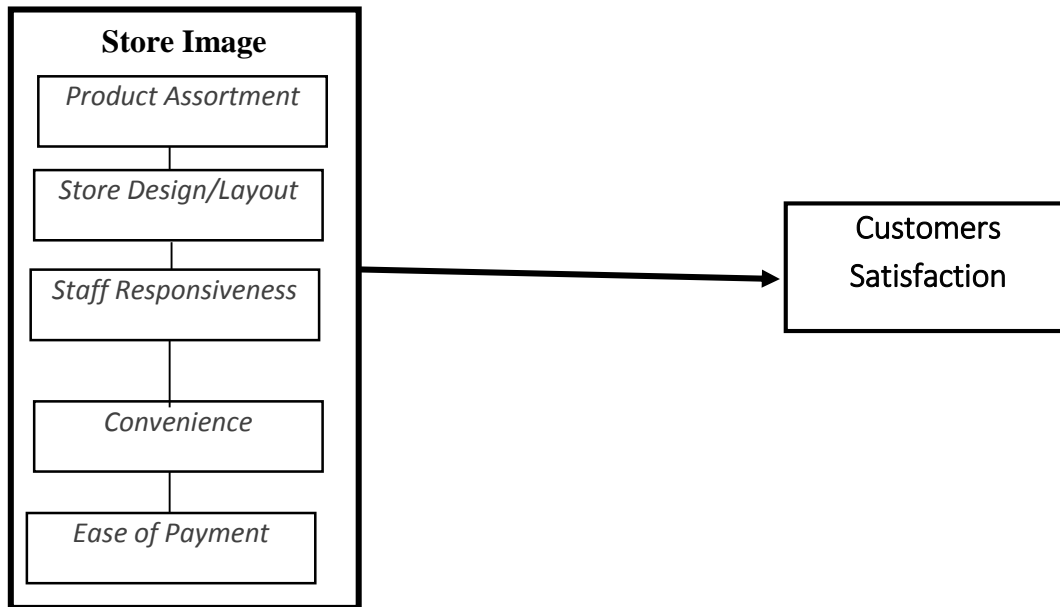


Figure 1. Operationalisation of Store Image and Customer Satisfaction of Supermarkets in Uyo Metropolis.

under pressure. Each payment method in a supermarket carries some benefits such as transaction speed, convenience and security (Ching and Hayashi, 2010). Some supermarkets improve traffic flow by engaging more than one cashier at the payment counter and adopting Point of Sale (POS) machines. Placing price tags on every product can go a long way to make payment easier and faster. Customers generally detest crowded shopping environment and so prefer environments with adequate traffic flow (Tlapan, 2009). The conceptual framework for this study is represented in Figure 1.

Theoretically, this study draws its strength from the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) developed by Oliver in 1977. The theory proposed that satisfaction level is as a result of the difference between expected and perceived performance. Expectation or desire are related to the pre-purchase time period that a customer determines what he expects of from the product. Experience or perceived performance are related to the after-purchase time period that the customer gets the experience after perceiving a real performance such as quality of a specific product or service. The difference between initial expectation or desire and perceived experience or performance is known as disconfirmation of expectation or desire (Elkhani and Bakri, 2012).

In applying this theory to this work, every customer expects a certain level of service performance upon his or her encounter with a supermarket's image. When a customer's perceived performance about the quality of service is better than the customer's expectation or desire, a positive disconfirmation will occur and then lead to customer satisfaction. On the other hand, when customers

perceive the performance to be worse than what they expected or desired about the quality of service, negative disconfirmation will result. Negative disconfirmation means perceived performance of products or services could not attract customer satisfaction.

A study conducted by Rana et al. (2014) tested a model of customer satisfaction for the retail chain stores of Bangladesh. Multiple regression was used to find out which factors significantly contributed to customer satisfaction. The results showed that the model satisfactorily explains customer satisfaction and that retail chain store owners and managers should focus on four major elements – responsiveness, product quality, physical design and pricing policies if customer satisfaction is to be treated as a strategic variable. Another study conducted by Naderian (2012) on store image attributes effect on customer satisfaction among Malaysian customers, tried to find out the variations of relationship between store image and customer satisfaction towards 7-Eleven stores in Malaysia. To analyse the data, the multiple regression was used. The findings identified several important factors with merchandise having the most significant effect on customer satisfaction, followed by price, personnel and atmosphere.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted to get information from respondents. The study was carried out among customers that patronise supermarkets in Uyo metropolis. This constituted an infinite population. To

determine the sample size for the customers, the Topman formula was adopted. Based on the formula, 244 customers formed the sample size for the study.

The sampling technique adopted for this study was the systematic sampling. This was carried out by dividing the total number of target customers (244) by the total number of registered supermarkets (50). This resulted in approximately 5 customers per supermarket. The 5 customers per supermarket was being chosen to give all the supermarkets in the study area equal chance in the survey. Hence 5 copies of questionnaire were administered on respondents across the 50 registered supermarkets.

The instrument of data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire. The 5-point Likert scale was used in measuring the dependent and independent variables. The research instrument had both face and content validity. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 12.2% of respondents and the Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure consistency at 0.866 which shows that the instrument was reliable. Data were presented and analysed using such statistically descriptive tools as tables, percentages, and frequencies. The statistical tool adopted for this study was the Regression analysis, to predict the relationship that exist between store image and customer satisfaction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research questions

Data retrieved from the copies of questionnaire on store image attributes and customer satisfaction are shown in Table 1. The data obtained revealed that 73.76% of respondents showed a positive attitude towards the availability of product assortments on the shelves of supermarkets. 3.63% of respondents were uncertain on whether product assortments had any influence on the store's image. 22.56% expressed negative responses towards the availability of product assortments at the Supermarket. This result agrees with the work of Mazelyte and Razbadauskite (2010), who asserted that although product assortment varies among retail stores, customers prefer stores which provide wide variety of products. The result also gains justification from Naderian (2012), who found that merchandise had the most significant effect on customer satisfaction. This result and those of previous studies indicates that if customers were offered a wider variety of products on the shelves of supermarkets, it could influence their preference to shop and recommend the supermarkets to others.

Most respondents (81.43%) had a positive view that a lot of supermarkets had an excellent presentation and arrangements of product display. 1.18% were uncertain of this store image attribute, and 16.65% were of a negative

view on the store design layout of the supermarkets. This result is in consonance with the findings of Rana et al. (2014) that store design layout has significant relationship with customer satisfaction. According to Tlapana (2009), a store that is able to communicate product information via in-store display actually assists customers to make informed purchase decision. According to the result in this study and that of previous studies, store design layout could be an influential factor of customer shopping experience in many supermarkets and could influence customers' intention to revisit a particular supermarket. The high positive response rate of this variable indicates that consumers perceived store design layout to be an important attribute in their choice of supermarkets to shop.

On staff responsiveness, 72.9% expressed a positive view that provision of prompt service delivery and staff attentiveness to complaints had an influence on their choice of supermarket, 9.13% were uncertain and 17.86% had a negative view that staff responsiveness had any influence on the store's image. Nadarian (2012) supported this fact that personnel service is one of the factors that keep customers satisfied. Rana et al (2014) also supported this fact in his study where it was determined that responsiveness showed significant impact on customer satisfaction and thus has strong positive relationship with satisfaction. This result in consonance with the works of Nadarian (2012) and Rana et al. (2014) indicated that most customers are irritated by nonresponsive, rude or inattentive supermarket staff and this had a great influence on their choice of supermarket to shop and their level of satisfaction experienced.

On checking how convenience influenced the store image, 71.46% were positive on accessibility of supermarket location, availability of trolley that allowed easy shelf to shelf movement, as well as easy exit and entry from the parking lots. 23.56% of respondents expressed a negative view, while others were not sure. In a study conducted by Silva and Giraldo (2010), five attributes were studied, of which convenience ranked the second highest factor that has significant relationship with customer satisfaction. The result from this study aligns with findings from previous studies and shows the level at which customers prioritize convenience in terms of parking space at the supermarket location as well as ease of movement within the supermarket.

On the ease of payments, 71.46% were positive towards the influence of availability of different payment options, sufficient number of cashiers, availability of price tags on items. On the other hand, 24.7% had a negative view of such influence and the rest were indifferent about the influence. This is in consonance with the findings of Tlapana (2009) who confirmed that improving traffic flow especially at the counter is essential for customer satisfaction as most customers complain about crowd density and inadequate traffic flow. In a study by Pan and Zinkhan (2006), it was found that check-out speed is a crucial element, thus, it can have positive influence with

Table 1. Frequency table.

Variables	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Product Assortment					
Supermarket has various kinds of products	51.2	30.4	4.4	8.0	6.0
Products needed are always available	26.2	34.4	4.5	27.5	7.4
Availability of new products	39.3	39.8	2.0	17.2	1.6
Store Design/Layout					
Excellent presentation and arrangement of products	39.3	39.8	2.0	17.2	1.6
Easy location of items	36.9	48.8	2.0	11.1	1.2
Ease of movement within the supermarket	29.9	49.6	1.6	17.2	1.6
Staff Responsiveness					
Politeness and kindness of staff	25.0	51.2	7.4	13.9	2.5
Staff attentiveness to complaints and enquiries	27.9	45.1	9.8	15.2	2.0
Provision of prompt service to customers	22.5	47.1	10.2	18.0	2.0
Convenience					
Accessibility of supermarket location	41.4	49.6	2.5	6.1	0.4
Availability of trolleys	25.0	36.5	5.7	27.0	5.7
Easy entry and exit from parking lot	23.0	38.9	6.6	25.8	5.7
Ease of Payment					
Availability of different payment options	23.4	30.3	4.5	29.5	12.3
Sufficient number of cashiers	25.0	43.9	5.7	20.5	4.5
Availability of price tags on products.	46.7	45.1	0.4	7.4	0.3
Customer Satisfaction					
Services rendered met expectations	33.8	33.9	6.1	20.9	5.3
Recommendation to family and friends	25.0	44.7	8.6	17.6	4.1
Commendable service and shopping experience	25.8	49.2	4.5	14.8	5.7
Supermarket being held as first on customers' choice list	21.7	30.3	11.1	24.6	12.3
General positive perception about services rendered	29.1	45.5	4.9	19.7	0.8

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Uncertain, D: Disagree and SD: Strongly Disagree.

customer satisfaction. The result thus shows that the availability of more than one payment channels like the alternatives of cash payments, POS machines, as well as different cashier points that could ease payments and limit the time spent by a customer at the counter greatly influenced customers' satisfaction at the store.

On considering the general store image, 67.8% were of a positive view that the services rendered met their expectations, 7.04% were uncertain, 25.16% were of a negative view. The satisfied customers agreed to recommend the stores to their families and friends, as the services and shopping experience was commendable. From the percentage responses, it is evident that the level of customer satisfaction was significant as compared to those who expressed dissatisfaction.

Test of hypothesis

The hypothesis test result is as shown in Table 2. The

hypothesis was measured at a 0.05 level of significance. If the P-value obtained in the analysis is less than 0.05 (i.e. $P\text{-value} < 0.05$), the null hypothesis will be rejected and accept the alternative.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Store Image and customer satisfaction.

From the regression analysis it could be found that store image had a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction since the p-value = 0.000 is less than 0.05 (p-value = 0.000 < 0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that store image had an impact on customer satisfaction with a regression co-efficient of $b_1 = 0.207$. The co-efficient of store image $b_1 = 0.207$ shows that for every unit increase in store image, a 20.7% unit increase in customer satisfaction is predicted. The $R^2 = 0.304$ indicates that the overall strength of association between

Table 2a. Regression analysis (Model Summary).

Model	Model Summary			
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.551 ^a	0.304	0.301	2.80498

a. Predictors: (Constant), Store Image.

Table 2b. Regression analysis (ANOVA).

Model	ANOVA ^a					
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significant.
1	Regression	831.645	1	831.645	105.701	0.000 ^b
	Residual	1904.039	242	7.868		
	Total	2735.684	243			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Store Image.

Table 2c. Regression analysis (Coefficients^a).

Model	Coefficients ^a					
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Significant
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.823	1.127		7.826	0.000
	Store Image	0.207	0.020	0.551	10.281	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction.

Table 2d. Regression analysis.

		Store Image	Customer Satisfaction
Store Image	Pearson Correlation	1	0.651**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	244	244
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	0.651**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	244	244

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

Source: Field work, (2016).

customer satisfaction and store image was moderate. Store image in this study was seen as a bundle which contained valuables such as product assortment, store design and layout, staff responsiveness. Other factors included convenience and ease of payment. The result of R^2 indicates that while 30.4% variance in customer satisfaction was explained by the store image attributes, 69.6% of the change in customer satisfaction was unexplained by the regression model, indicating that customer satisfaction when shopping was a function of a wider range of attributes.

The result from the test of hypothesis corroborates with the findings of Silva and Giraldi (2010) who used seven

store image factors (Assortment, Convenience, Reputation, Price, Atmosphere, Layout and Service) to measure satisfaction. Their findings showed a moderate relationship (27.3%) between the variables. Similarly, they also concluded that there was a moderate dependence relationship between store image variables and satisfaction. They acknowledged that there are factors other than image that also influence customers' satisfaction with a store. Despite this, the findings in this study as well as previous studies (Tlapana, 2009; Nadarian, 2012; Rana et al., 2014) shows that store image was responsible for nearly 30% of the variation in satisfaction.

Managerial and theoretical implications

The implications of our findings indicate that managers should not focus all of their efforts on only these five attributes (product assortment, store design and layout, staff responsiveness, convenience and ease of payment) as much as they are important, but they could look at the quality of the products being offered, the shelf-life of the products, the environmental attributes of the store and the general atmospherics. Managers from time to time should also carry out researches to find out how their store image is being rated by customers and what percentage of their sales results from customers' consideration of their store image.

Theoretically, it has been established that since expectations or desire determines what customers expect from the product, store image attributes does have an influence on customer satisfaction. But this may differ when factors such as the external environment, size of supermarket, economic state of the society and the level of development is considered.

Conclusion

A good store image leaves a memorable experience in the minds of customers. Just as most customers are thrilled when they patronise a newly opened refurbished store, they are also excited whenever they enter a supermarket with a well-furnished interior and exterior design/layout, well assorted products, a welcoming environment where they are attended to and their complaints looked into. These customers leave the shops satisfied with the services and customers tend to carry out repeat purchases, which could eventually make them loyal customers. The satisfaction of the positive word of mouth communication which eventually attracts others to the supermarket. Thus, retailers must consistently improve on their store attributes by improving on the product assortment, making the store more convenient, being mindful of the store layout and providing ease of payments. Moreover, the staff should be encouraged to show good disposition towards the customers. This could be achieved through periodic in-house training for the staff.

Suggestions for further study

This study had taken the variables associated with store image as a whole, but further studies could dissect the whole and include more store image attributes to ascertain their various levels of influence on customer satisfaction.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

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