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INSTITUTIONAL LOCATION AND CUSTOMERS' CHOICE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between institutional location and customers' choice of private universities in Imo state Nigeria. The study used descriptive survey research design, and questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The data collected in this study was presented using simple percentage and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05% level of significance. It was discovered that nearness to the town and security has significant and positive influence on customer loyalty and repeat visit. The study concludes that the achievement of improved customers' choice (Customers loyalty and customer repeat purchase) in the private university depends on the effectiveness of institutional location. The study recommends private universities should be located close to places where there are appreciable numbers of potential student population. Private universities that have witnessed positive student patronage at a place should expand their programmes to encourage customer repeat visits. The location of private universities should be in a conducive learning environment as that can add values to achieve customers' repeat purchase and attract more students. In addition, security of lives and properties, both of staff and students as well as visitors to the university should be of paramount concern in the choice of location proximity.

Keywords: Location, Nearness to the Town, Security, Customers' Choice, Customer Loyalty and Customer Repeat Purchase.

Introduction

Every society strives to provide educational service to its citizens. Efforts to ensure that citizens get good education stem from the public view on education as a society leveler and instrument that can be used to close the gap between the haves

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and have not in the society. In Nigeria, the general population explosion experienced has led to demand for the establishment of more universities in the country. The resultant expansion in the primary and secondary school population today poses demand for the establishment of more institutions of higher learning to accommodate leavers of the lower level schools seeking higher educational qualifications. Over the years, there has been increasing demand for university admission through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination (JAMB). The population of students seeking university admission through JAMB is massive for equal entrance opportunities to public universities. The situation has necessitated private participation in the establishment of universities to provide university education for deserving students. Specifically, Nicolescu, L. (2009) defines place as any way that the customer can obtain a product or receive a service. Place means the location of the university and it covers issues like nearness to the town, within a good learning environment, nearness to populated areas and so on. . For this study the basic institutional location variables has been made to include nearness to the town and security. When the above institutional locations are positive, they lead to students' patronage of the private universities. For Kotler and Fox (1995), location replaces the place.

Another basic variable in this study is customers' choice, which can be positive through the effectiveness of institutional location. Patronage is the extent consumers or people acquire an organizational product or service. If private universities must achieve sustainable growth, they must be patronized by the students, hence the issues of students choice of the universities. . Many issues determine the level of customers' choice for a particular university. Such factors and issues include price, programmes, reference/promotion, standards in the school system, level of infrastructural development, teaching and learning methods etc (Ike, 2019). But for this study the basic variable has been made to include customer loyalty and customer repeat purchase. For that, the level of customers' choice in a particular university could be measured by determining the number of students that were admitted in different courses/departments in the university, the number of students the university graduates from different courses/department from the university in each year. If the numbers are high and reasonable, it means improved patronage and high level of students' preference for the choice of the particular private university.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is generally an increased competition among private universities in Nigeria; and Imo state in particularly. There is also a constant struggle to maintain their position in the higher educational service market. The major challenge in relations to this topic is the aspect of universities with high tuitions and their increased rate of population in respect to admission to seekers unlike those universities with affordable tuitions but have less / under population in respect to the number of admission seekers. Also, one of the major

challenges is the ever growing number of students seeking admission into Nigerian universities on a yearly basis. This could be attributed to the increasing awareness on the need to be educated by the populace. This invariably necessitates the relevance of providing corresponding qualitative educational facilities to fill the gap of inadequate and shortage of public universities in meeting the ever growing qualitative educational need of the people. This assertion is supported byBamidele, (2021), giving the argument that, the eagerness for university education by a large proportion of Nigerian populace regardless of age has resulted in serious problems in the process of being offered admission into public universities across the country. Consequently, the private universities took advantage of this scenario to indiscriminately charge high fees for the quality of services being rendered. The indiscriminate charges could be as a result of multi-dimensional factors such as, cost of provision of educational infrastructure, locational peculiarities; institutional need for security, qualities of resource persons, and administrative charges amongst others.. However, there are several other problems associated with the study. Therefore, this study focused on institutional location and customers' choice of private universities in Imo state.

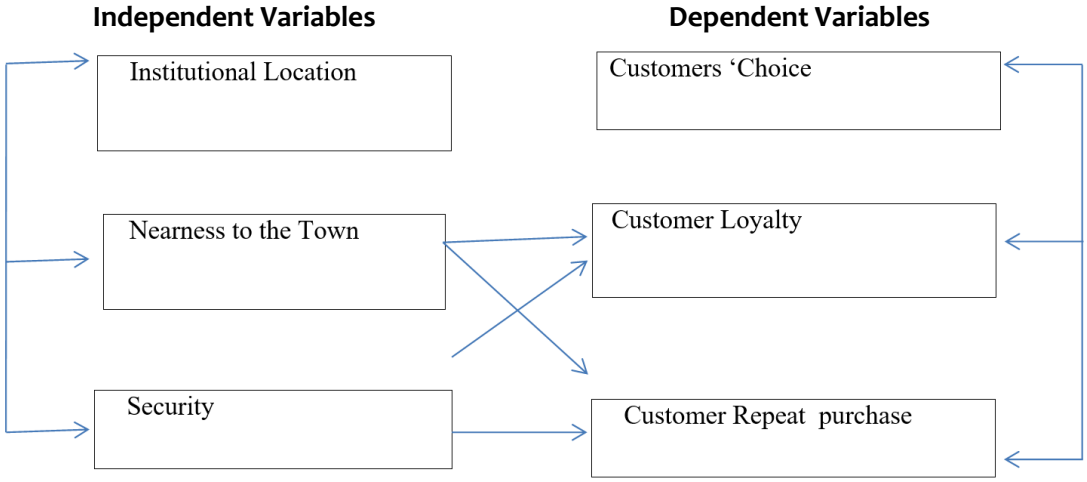


Fig 1: Operational Conceptual Framework **Source: The Researcher desk, 2024**

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study focuses on the effect of institutional location on customers' choice of private universities in Imo state. The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the effect of nearness to the town on customer loyalty of private universities.
2. determine the relationship between nearness to the town and customer repeat purchase in private universities.
3. examine the effect of security on customer loyalty of private universities.

4. investigate the relationship between security and customer repeat purchase in private universities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were posed for the study.

1. What is the effect of nearness to the town on customer loyalty of private universities?
2. What is the relationship between nearness to the town and customer repeat purchase in private universities?
3. What is the effect of security on customer loyalty of private universities?
4. What is the relationship between security and customer repeat purchase in private universities?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research hypotheses guided the study.

Ho_1: Nearness to the town has no significant effect on customer loyalty of private universities.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between nearness to the town and customer repeat purchase in private universities.

Ho_3: Security does not have a significant effect on customer loyalty of private universities.

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between security and customer repeat purchase in private universities.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Location

Bamidele, (2021) defines place as any way that the customer can obtain a product or receive a service. In the service marketing for private university, place means the location of the university and it covers issues like nearness to the town, within a good learning environment, nearness to populated areas and so on. Bowersox and Closs (2018) were of the view that when organization is near to the people or market, it adds value to the level of patronage. According to them, nearness is the third element of the marketing mix, and it encompasses all decisions and tools which relate to making services available to customers in the organization. Kotler and Armstrong (2006) also define place as a set of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making a university service available for use or consumption by consumers - students. Place strategy calls for effectiveness on the part of the organization so as to utilize it for the benefits of the university Bamidele, (2021). Kotler & Armstrong (2006)agree that place has significant effect on university performance. Place is all about nearness of the university to the people.(Ike, 2019), conducted a research on how does places influence firm performance.

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Findings revealed that university profitability and growth depends on its nearness to the market. (Ike, 2019) asserts that the location of organization can mar or enhance the performance in terms of patronage and profit

Institutional Locations variables for Private University

1. **Nearness to the town:** Private universities are usually located in the towns due to the population density of such places as against the villages. Such proximity allows for easy location and access by intending students. It carries the advantage of reducing certain observable problems faced by students in terms of transportation, accommodation, availability of and access to social amenities, sporting facilities, as well as attraction of foreign visitors. These make the private universities readily available to student to choose as preferred institutions. Obasi (2006)
2. **Security:** Security as Dasuki (2013) puts it, is defined as absence of insecurity as a result of actions of law enforcement agencies. He further stressed that security was understood to be the job of the defense force of the national frontiers and of the police inside the country. Such perception sums up security to be equal to a state of law and order. However, he emphasized that the dynamics of our society has since altered that configuration of security to now include consideration for societally generated crises such as riots, demonstrations, secret cult-related criminal acts, terrorism, drug-trafficking, intra and inter-ethnic strife, religious intolerance, advanced fee fraud, antigovernment campaigns, armed robberies, hijack, kidnapping and a host of others that threaten lives and properties and indeed the peace and tranquility of man and society. This now portrays security currently as everybody's business, and a business in which everybody has a role to play and a stake to protect. The essence of a country's security is therefore pointed toward the honest concern with the wellbeing, welfare and interest of all citizens, and the preservation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity against external aggression. Former American secretary of defense, Robert McNamara had earlier married security and development together when he stated interalia: security is development and development is security. This holds that development cannot take place where security is threatened. This does not imply that countries all over the world where development takes place are free of security threats. However, the security challenges countries face gradually become part of the country's history and so, on a daily basis countries contend explicably with whatever security threats faced by them as not to deter their continuous development. Security suggests the establishment of proactive and defensive measures to safeguard all persons, properties and materials. Generally, the security interest of any nation should include but not limited to safety of life and properties, economic, physiological, social, and mental well-being and even

the mere freedom to pursue the attainment of legitimate objectives without hindrance. So national security will mean all things done to eliminate distractions and abuses of safety so as to create an environment free, safe and convenient enough to attract investments, developments and growth.

Customers' Choice of Private Universities

Patronage is the extent consumers or people acquire an organizational product or service. If private universities must achieve sustainable growth, they must be patronized by the students, hence the issues of students choice of the universities. This is all about the activities of students to make decision on the university to attend. When a private university is enjoying high patronage of students, it means the school is performing positively. Many factors according to Hayes (2012) help students to make decision concerning a particular university. Such include finance, nearness, courses offers, connection with some people (staff or students) in the school, and other needs. Many issues determine the level of students' patronage or preference for a particular university. Such factors and issues include price, programmes, reference/promotion, standard in the school system, level of infrastructural development, teaching and learning methods etc (Ike, 2019).

For that, the level of students' patronage in a particular university could be measured by determining the number of students that were admitted in different courses/departments in the university, the number of students the university graduates from different courses/department from the university in each year. If the numbers are high and reasonable, it means improved patronage and high level of students' preference for the choice of the particular private university. The students' choice is a complex series of activities, in which individuals are participating or acting differently (Litten, 2012). Five steps of the students' choice process are: needs & motives, information gathering, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post evaluation (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong, 2005:279). A need or motive is usually trigger in the student when a student realizes that he/she wants to pursue higher education, and searches for information about potential HE providers.

Knowing the reasons applicants choose universities and courses of studies, is important to developing institutional positioning (Maringe, 2006). Applicants to higher education are no longer passive consumers; they became informed consumers who make rational choices of higher education courses and institutions (Baldwin & James, 2000). However, the specificity of higher education is that most students (undergraduates) are one time consumers (Temple & Shattock, 2007) as opposed to the business sector where repeat purchases take place often. This results in differences in consumer behaviour in the two sectors and possible different marketing strategies to address consumers in the two sectors. For this study, customers' choice of private universities could be measured using;

1. **Customer loyalty:** Customer loyalty can be defined as a deeply held commitment to continue with the patronage of a preferred product, service or service provider consistently in future even in the face of marketing efforts capable of causing defection and situational influences, (Oliver, 2019). According to Jones and Sasser (2015), it is the feeling of attachment or affection consumers hold towards a product, services or company's personnel. A company's ability to attract and retain new customers is related not only to its products or services but also to the way it services its existing customers, the value the customers actually perceive as a result of utilizing the solutions, and the reputation it creates within and across the market place(Ike, 2019). Successful customer retention involves more than giving the customer what they expect. Generating loyal advocates of the brand might mean exceeding customer expectations. The key differentiation in a competitive environment is often the delivery of a consistently high standard of customer serviceKotler (2013). Further, in the emerging world of customer success, retention is a major objectiveNicolescu, L. (2009). Customer retention has a direct impact on profitability. Research by (Ike, 2019)indicates that engaging customers, while having engaged employees return a revenue gain of 3-4 times the norm.
2. **Customer repeat purchase:** Customers can be divided into new customers and repeat customers. Private university proprietors are obviously concerned about attracting new students. 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 purchases by 5%, you raise 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. Attracting new ones is very important, but since over 60% of customers of a successful private university are repeat ones, it is evident that much attention and focus be placed on satisfying repeat purchase 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 Nicolescu, L. (2009). Turning a customer into a repeat one is more an art than a science. 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. That means that, after a first degree in the university, the graduate would want to come back to the same university for further studies like masters' degree and doctoral degree program. Also, their siblings would want to pursue their own studies in the same university.

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THEORETICAL REVIEW

Environmental Theory

This theory was developed by Miller in 1979. The theory states that the nature of the environment of an organizational location determines the viability of the organization. For that, an attractive university environment appeals to students, and that motivate them to have interest with the school and patronize the school. The term 'environment' refers to the physical setting in which organizational activities takes. Here students prefer some private university over others because of good environmental factors. Such environmental factors include aesthetics, availability of e-learning equipment, improved infrastructural facilities, availability of instructional materials, and laboratory equipment etc. when the above are adequately provided, it leads to improve student's patronage and satisfaction for the universities.

Agglomeration Location Model

This model was developed by Spani in 1978. The model stated that the nature of the location determines the economic benefits and growth in the universities. Location model is primarily concerned with the area or regional of the organisation. In this study, the researcher adopts the 4ps model to analyse the study. It states that a certain area is best suited for a particular activity of the university.According to the model, locations of economic activities are influenced by economies derived from large-scale operation and from proximity to complementary firms and facilities. In this case, economic benefit of the universities could be achieved when the universities location is situated in a good and friendly environment. This model was used because the students consider the location of a university before taken decision of where to study. Such issues in location mainly considered include nearness, friendliness, socio-economic factors and many others.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In this subsection, the researcher summarized some related works on this topic.

Akata (2022) focused on marketing mix and patronage colleges of education in Nigeria. It used survey method and data were analyzed using mean. It discovered that promotion and price are the major determinant of patronage.

Oyakhire (2021) carried out a research on the effect of digital marketing strategy on consumers' choice of online businesses in Nigeria. A survey was conducted with 30 top online businesses of which 5 top management staff were selected as sample from each of the companies using structured questionnaire and analysed using both mean and standard deviation and the hypotheses tested using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings show that social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy, and affiliate marketing strategy have positive effects on consumers' patronage. All the proxies for digital marketing strategy have a positive effect on consumers' patronage.

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Nwadigoha and Ahaiwe (2021) carried out an empirical study in Port Harcourt Nigeria on the effect of frontline functionality on consumer patronage of four star hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. The study employed the survey research design and 145 respondents were judgmentally sampled for the study. Data was analyses using T-test statistical and results revealed that job knowledge, interactive and engagement skills have significant positive effects on customer patronage. This implies that enhancing the capacity of the frontline officers through training can significantly increase customer patronage, market share and boost consumer's confidence on the services provided by the firm.

Martin (2019) focused on the influence of marketing mix on the students' choice of university – Two State Universities in Sweden. The aim of the study is to determine if the traditional services marketing mix influence the students, when selecting a university. The work adopts a case study approach using qualitative method in the collection of data via the use of structural interviews. The sampled populations were the university's administrations and the students. An inductive approach is applied in the data analysis. Findings from the study show that, the HE uses different marketing mix strategies in the recruitment of students. The study also found out that the marketing mix elements have a positive impact in the student's choice of a university. The programme, Promotional mix, place, price, people and Physical Evidence are directly related to the student's choice of the HE.

Ogungbayi, Olamide and Adebayo (2019) assess service marketing and customers' choice in some selected private universities in south west Nigeria. The study used semi-experimental survey design. A total of one hundred and fifteen (115) structured questionnaires was distributed, out which ninety seven (97) respondents representing 84.3% completed and returned the questionnaire. Percentage was used for analysis of data. It was discovered that there was significant relationship ($x2 = 837.990a > x2=9.488$, $p<0.05$) between the various service marketing and customers' choice. It was further confirmed that service quality delivery to customers was the major challenge of some of the private universities in south west Nigeria which is on how to deliver the service to customers in a way that will bring patronage to them.

Nguru and Ibrahim (2018) focused on institutional location and customer patronage in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Survey method was used and data were analyzed using mean. It discovered that institutional location can significantly increase customer patronage of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

Onyenaucheya (2017) investigated the consequences of institutional location on customer patronage of private universities in Multan Pakistan. The data used in the present study was collected by using a self – administered questionnaire. Data were collected from student of private universities in Pakistan. Sample size was 400 and copies of the questionnaires were distributed to collect data among top universities located in Multan. Out of 400 copies of the questionnaires, 330 were selected for analysis. SPSS

(version 20.0) was used for analysis and statistical tools like ANOVA, correlation analysis and multiple regressions were used. The result of the present study show that there exists a direct relation between institutional location and customer patronage as well as customer expertise moderates the relationship.

RESEARCH GAP

On the topic, some of the past studies focused on institutional location without any emphasis on customers' choice of the private universities. Others studied customers' choice without adequate attention to institutional location. Some of the past studies were done outside Nigeria without specific consideration to Nigerian business environment. Some works done within Nigeria did not use universities in Imo state as the focal point. The objectives and its variables as used in this work were not covered or adequately covered by the past studies. Most of the past studies did not use institutional location indexes – nearness to the town and security; and how the significantly influence customers' choice of private universities i.e. customer loyalty and customer repeat purchase.

Past studies did not adequately review literature to cover the basic conceptual review, theoretical review and empirical review as covered in this work. Some of the past studies use only secondary data, through expos facto research design, and did not cover primary data through questionnaire as will use in this work. Some that use survey research design (as used in this work), used only interview method, and did not consider questionnaire. More so, study population/sample, and statistical tools used for data analysis from the past studies differ from what were employed in this work. Based on the forgoing, it could be seen that differences exist between the past researches and the present study. For that, there is a gap which this study wants to fill. This study therefore focused on institutional location and customers' choice of private universities in Imo state.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design:** In this study, survey research design was used. A survey is a research design that enables a researcher to take information from primary sources (Ubah, Nnamdi, Okwara, Makbere & Ochienta, 2021). The choice of survey design is appropriate since there is need to cover a larger percentage of the population in the study. Survey research has as its aim not only the collection of data per say, but the discovery of meaning in the data collected so that the facts and events can be better interpreted, explained and understood
- **Population of the Study:** Nwodu (2006) reported that population refers to the entire group of people, events or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate. This study used three private universities in Abia State. The population of this study is therefore made up of all the students in Gregory University, Uturu, Clifford University, Owerrinta, Spiritan University, Nneochi,

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and they have a population of 2000, 6600, 2040, respectively, making a total of 10640 in all (**Source:** The Personnel Unit of the Universities, 2024).

- **Sample Size Determination:** They researcher used the Taro Yamane's method to determine the sample size. The reason for using Taro Yamane formular in determining the sample size in this study is because the entire population of staff in the private universities are relatively large, and will be difficult to study all. For that, the Taro Yamane therefore helped to reduce the sample size of each university to a manageable standard. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size
N = Population of study
$(e)^2$ = Square of the level of significance

$$n = \frac{10640}{1+10640(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{10640}{1+10640(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{10640}{27.6}$$

$$= 385.5$$

= 385 sample size

- **Research instrument:** In this study, the research used both primary and secondary sources of data. Questionnaire served as primary sources of data and secondary data were collected through literature review.
- **Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:** Content and face validity were used to validate the instrument. In order to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, test/retest exercise was carried out by the researcher.
- **Data Analysis Technique:** The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (at 0.05% level of significance) through SPSS version 20.0. Simple percentage and mean statistic was used to analyze the demographic variables of the respondents. More so, Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (at 0.05% level of significance) through SPSS version 20.0 was used to test the hypotheses.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Out of the 385 copies of the questionnaire distributed by the researcher, only 375 copies were properly filled and returned.

Personal Data

a) Demographics of respondents

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Table 1: Sample profile.

Options	% of Responses
Gender	
Male	74.0
Female	26.0
Age	
Below 19yrs	69.1
20-23yrs	23.0
Above 24yrs	7.8
Student level	
100 level	30.6
200 level	23.4
300 level	24.0
400 level	22.0
Marital status	
Single	84.8
Married	15.2

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table1 shows that 61.0% of the respondents were males and 49.0% of the respondents were female, 69.1% of the respondents 19yrs,23.0%are of the respondent are 20-23yrs and 7.8% are above24yrs, 30.6% of the respondents are 100 level, while 23.4% of the respondents are 200 level, 24.0% of the respondents are 300 level and 22,0% of the respondent are 400 level, 84.8% of the respondents were single whereas, 15.2% of the respondents were married.

Table 2: The effects of nearness to the town on customer loyalty to private universities.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	∑X	X	Dec.
1	Location of the university affects patronage	218	157	-	-	375	1343	3.6	Positive
2	Universities which are within strategic and good locations get more students	152	199	16	8	375	1245	3.3	Positive
3	Private universities located within many public universities may not attract more students	200	140	18	17	375	1263	3.4	Positive
	Grand mean							3.4	

It was discovered in table 2 that, items 1 to 3 were all positive. This is because item 1 has a mean of 3.6, item 2 has a mean of 3.3 and item 3 has mean of 3.4, ; hence all the items

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have mean scores more than 2.5 and above. It is therefore concluded that there is significant effects of nearness to the town on customers' choice of private universities.

Table 3: The relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase in private universities.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	∑X	X	Dec.
1	Location of the universities encourages customers' repeat purchase.	225	150	-	-	375	1350	3.6	positive
2	Unfavourable location of the university may make it to lose customers' repeat purchase.	145	202	20	10	375	1236	3.3	positive
3	Private universities located within many public universities may have many of her customers repeat purchase.	130	55	150	40	375	1025	2.7	negative
	Grand mean							2.9	

It was discovered in table 3 that, items 1 to 3 were all positive. This is because item 1 has a mean of 3.6, item 2 has a mean of 3.3, item 3 has a mean of 2.7, hence all the items have mean scores more than 2.5 and above. It is therefore concluded that there is significant relationship between nearness to the town and customers repeat purchase in private universities.

Table 4: The effects of security on customer loyalty of private universities.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	∑X	X	Dec.
1	Security of the environment of a private university can make or mar customers' patronage and loyalty	155	175	25	20	375	1215	3.2	Positive
2	A feeling of security and serenity by customers of, and visitors to a private university can enhance customer loyalty	154	194	18	9	375	1243	3.3	Positive
3	Parents of graduates of a private university where security is guaranteed allow siblings to patronize the university	174	129	48	24	375	1203	3.2	Positive
	Grand mean							3.2	

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It was discovered in table 4.that, items 1 to 3 were all positive. This is because item 1 has a mean of 3.2, item 2 has a mean of 3.3, item 3 has a mean of 3.2,hence all the items have mean scores more than 2.5 and above. It is therefore concluded that there is significant effects of security on customer loyalty of private universities.

Table 5: The relationship between security and customer repeat purchase in private universities.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	∑X	X	Dec.
1	Good security situation in a private university encourages customers' repeat purchase.	152	173	30	20	375	1207	3.2	Positive
2	Graduates take security experience into consideration while deciding a repeat purchase.	175	168	22	10	375	1258	3.4	Positive
3	A private university that lacks appropriate security measures hardly attract repeat purchase.	158	139	50	28	375	1177	3.1	Positive
	Grand mean							3.2	

It was discovered in table 5 that, items 1 to 3 were all positive. This is because item 1 has a mean of 3.2, item 2 has a mean of 3.4, item 3 has a mean of 3.1, hence all the items have mean scores more than 2.5 and above. It is therefore concluded that there is significant relationship between security and customer repeat purchase in private universities.

TESTING OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Ho_1: There is no significant effect of nearness to the town on customers' loyalty of private universities.

H1	**There is significant effect of nearness to the town on customers' loyalty of private universities.**	**Pearson Correlation = 0.89 Sig = 0.05 N = 375**	**Decision HIGHLY STRONG**

The result above is highly strong. This is because the Pearson correlation is 0.89. It means there is significant and positive relationship. The significance result which is 0.05 is higher than the Pearson correlation result meaning the variables (nearness to the town) significantly related. We therefore conclude that there is significant effect of nearness to the town on customers' loyalty of private universities.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase in private universities.

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H2	**There is no significant relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase in private universities**	**Pearson Correlation 0.88 Sig = 0.05 N = 375**	=	Decision HIGHLY STRONG

The result above is strong. This is because the Pearson correlation is 0.88. It means there is significant and positive relationship. The significance result which is 0.05 is lower than the Pearson correlation result meaning the variables (nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase.) is not significantly related. We therefore conclude that there is no significant relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase in private universities.

Ho_3: There is no significant effect of security on customers' loyalty of private universities.

H3 There is significant effect of security on customers' loyalty of private universities.	**Pearson Correlation = 0.87 Sig = 0.05 N = 375**	**Decision STRONG**

The result above is highly strong. This is because the Pearson correlation is 0.87. It means there is significant and positive relationship. The significance result which is 0.05 is higher than the Pearson correlation result meaning the variables (security and customers' loyalty) significantly related. We therefore conclude that there is significant effect of security on customers' loyalty.

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between security and customers' repeat purchase in private universities.

H4	**There is significant relationship between security and customers' repeat purchase in private universities**	**Pearson Correlation 0.87 Sig = 0.05 N = 375**	=	**DECISION HIGHLY STRONG**

The result above is strong. This is because the Pearson correlation is 0.87. It means there is significant and positive relationship. The significance result which is 0.05 is higher than the Pearson correlation result meaning the variables (security and customers' repeat purchase.). We therefore conclude that there is significant relationship between security and customers' repeat purchase in private universities.

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Concise table result for hypotheses testing.

S/N	Hypotheses	Statistical Tools Applied (Software R studio)	Decision
H1	There is significant effect of nearness to the town on customer loyalty.	Pearson Correlation = 0.89 Sig = 0.05 N = 375	STRONG
H2	There is no significant relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase in private universities	Pearson Correlation = 0.88 Sig = 0.05 N = 375	STRONG
H3	There is significant effect of security on customer loyalty of private universities	Pearson Correlation = 0.87 Sig = 0.05 N = 375	STRONG
H4	There is significant relationship between security and customers' repeat purchase in private universities	Pearson Correlation = 0.87 Sig = 0.05 N = 375	STRONG

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In hypothesis one, it was discovered that nearness to the town of the private university significantly influences customers' loyalty. Private Universities located within some environments have advantage of getting more students than others. Kotler (2013), nearness to the town is considered by students before their application.

For hypothesis two, it was revealed that there is close relationship between nearness to the town and customers' repeat purchase. This means that after a first degree in the university, the graduate would want to go back to the same university for further studies, like Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree programmes. Also, their siblings would want to pursue their own studies in the same university (Kabuoh, 2017).

In hypothesis three, this work revealed that security influences customers' loyalty to private universities. According to Smriti (2020), students look for schools which have good security. For Ritesh and Mitesh (2012), schools that operate in secure atmosphere most times attract more students because they find them convenient.

The test of hypothesis four revealed that there is significant relationship between security and customers' repeat purchase. For Akpan & Etor (2016), security is part of the teaching and learning environment of the university system. It entails the congeniality of the atmosphere of the place. Where there is insecurity there is high probability of students and potential students avoiding the particular university entirely.

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CONCLUSION

The impact of institutional location and customers' choice of private universities in Imo state cannot be neglected. This is because, for a private university to achieve its goals, it must look into the effectiveness of its nearness to the town, and security. When the above indices are positive, it will add values on the extent to which the private university can achieve customers' loyalty and repeat purchases. This is as a result of the fact that prospective students of the private universities, in most cases look for favorable environments which will benefit them when they patronizes the universities. Practically in Nigeria today, institutions that are in close proximity with towns attract more students than those that are farther away. Moreover, security of the place is of utmost concern. Most students avoid institutions that are prone to violence and other forms of insecurity. This study concludes that the achievement of customers' choice (customers' loyalty and customers' repeat purchase) in the private universities depends on the effectiveness of the institutional location.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations could be made:

1. Private universities should be located close to places where there are appreciable number of potential student population.
2. Private universities that have witnessed positive student patronage at a place should expand their programmes to encourage customer repeat visits.
3. The location of private universities should be in a conducive learning environment as that can add values to achieve customers' repeat purchase and attract more students;
4. Security of lives and properties, both of staff and students as well as visitors to the university should be of paramount concern in the choice of location proximity.

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