FACTORS INFLUENCING NEIGHBORHOOD PREFERENCE AND CHOICE IN YOLA – NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Several factors are responsible for neighborhood preferences and choices ranging from neighborhood attributes to benefits derived from it as well as personal values of neighborhood user. As a geographically localized community within a larger city, it is of utmost importance for people to choose the kind of neighborhood they live therein. The quality of the neighborhood environments and their evaluations are so significant to the residents. These evaluations are often based on the diversity and complexity of personal senses of looking at the neighborhood setting as well as the varied lifestyles, personal demands, and preferences. More often than not, the choices of a given neighborhood are motivated or otherwise by the outcomes of the evaluations made by potential residents. The aim of this paper is to present factors influencing residents' choices and preferences of neighborhood environments in Yola, Nigeria. The study was conducted within the methodological framework of means-end chain (MEC) research model, using the laddering interview technique. Ten respondents were interviewed, response recorded, transcribed and content analyzed. The results showed that several neighborhood attributes (proximity, family setup, accessibility, quietness, terrain, and not overcrowded) are reasons for preference and choice. Six of the Schwartz's value domains of hedonism, security, universalism, achievement, self-direction, and benevolence were found to motivate these preferences and choices factors. It is important to plan neighborhoods that will engender safety of residents, make them very happy and give them a sense of satisfaction.

Keywords: *Neighborhood; Means-end chain model; Laddering Interview*

INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood choice factor and preference in an environment is crucial in understanding the effective direction toward addressing neighborhood life styles and human habitation (Rahman et al., 2012). Neighborhood

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choice factor can be categorized into physical and social environment. The social environmental factors include the perceived level of satisfaction of residents with respect to crime and social support from neighbors (Elizabeth and Robert, 2006). However, the physical environment has the potential to influence the social environment. According to Samira et al. (2013), people prefer associating with a natural and aesthetically appealing environment and this has an influence on neighborhood choice. The various factors that people take into consideration while making neighborhood choice have been researched upon (Samira et al., 2013; Bruch and Mare, 2006; Maarten et al., 2018). Accessibility factor influence the choice of neighborhood according to Elizabeth and Robert, (2006). Samira et al. (2013) posited that accessibility to neighborhood facilities like public spaces and open greenery enhance social interaction among residents in a neighborhood, hence people tend to make green environment a factor in the choice of their neighborhood.

Closeness to neighborhood facilities and amenities can contribute largely to neighborhood preference and choice. The significance of neighborhood environment to urban dwellers cannot be overemphasized. It remains the most fundamental basis of life; because where people live or spend the majority of their lives affect their economic, social, health, and mental well-being. Due to the diversity of personal senses of looking at things as well as the varied lifestyles, people's demands, preferences and evaluations of their neighborhood environment are equally becoming more diversified (Elizabeth and Robert, 2006). Several convergent definitions have been given to the term Neighborhood. For example, Rashid et al. (2013) defined it as "a place with physical and symbolic boundaries" while Ansello (2016) labeled it as "a place and people with common sense limit as the area one can easily walk over". On the other hand, Carolyn et al. (2006) see it as "a physical or geographical entity with specific boundaries".

A large body of literature exists on neighborhood satisfaction (Elizabeth and Robert, 2006; Samira et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2012; Erase Racism, 2012; Maarten et al., 2018) to mention few. Studies have shown that communities do not have the same level of infrastructure; likewise individuals who reside in them and those individuals with a varied cultural background may live in a neighborhood and yet not share similar views regarding environmental features (Elizabeth and Robert, 2012; Douglas et

al., 2015). Study also had shown why residents prefer some residential districts to others. For instance, Hamam et al. (2013) found strong relationships between individual's travel pattern and residential location preference. Erase Racism (2012) identified 'the functionality and spaciousness of the house itself' as the most significant determinant for neighborhood preference. Jonathan and Lawrence (2007), on the other hand, identified the rating of existing facilities, especially, schools for the children as determinants for neighborhood preference.

The purpose/aim of this study is partly grounded on the importance of a study of this nature especially for urban planning and environmental management. One can also use residential choice data to explore the extent to which people's choices are constrained by discrimination, low income, or lack of information (Erase Racism, 2012). Mobility studies can combine information on residential choices of individuals with population data on neighborhoods to infer the population dynamics and residential patterns that are implied by the residential preferences and choices of individuals (Creatore et al., 2016; Erase Racism, 2012; Rahman et al., 2012). Nonetheless, individuals do vary in their preferences for different kinds of neighborhoods. This paper presents findings of factors influencing preference and choice of neighborhoods in Yola- Nigeria. The investigation was based on the methodological framework of Means-End Chain (MEC) model.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
The Means-End Chain (MEC) Model
The Means-End Chain (MEC) model (Gutman, 1982) originally developed by Jonathan Gutman for merchandized products, which application in the field of architecture and urban design has been very useful and successful in the past few decades (Tania et al., 2006) is the framework within which this research work is anchored. Gutman (1982) first introduced the concept, with a focus on qualitative in-depth understanding of consumer motives. Reynolds and Gutman (1988) made MEC model well-accepted by providing a hands-on description of how to conduct, analyze and use MEC interviews (Weijters & Muylle, 2008). Kaciak and Cullen (2006) asserted that MEC has been a popular and ever-evolving research domain since its introduction. Gutman (1982) defined MEC as a model that seeks to explain how a product or service selection facilitates the achievement of desired end states. The variables

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or constructs of the original structure of MEC model (Gutman, 1982) are attributes, consequences and values (Fig. 1).

Attributes → Consequences → Values

Figure 1: Structure of MEC (Source: Gutman, 1982)

It explores the connection between consumer and product through the construction of a simple associative network between concrete and abstract product attributes, functional and psychological consequences linked with product use and finally, consumers instrumental and terminal values. Gengler and Reynolds (1995) defines attribute as relatively concrete meanings that represent physical or perceptible characteristics in a product. Attributes can be seen as the intrinsic and physical features, properties or characteristics that define a product or person (Zinas, 2013).

Coolen and Hoekstra (2001) defines consequences as every direct or indirect result of a person's behavior. Lin (2002) posits that consequences are what the consumer feels after consuming the product, this might be a positive feeling e.g. benefits, or a negative feeling, e.g. perceived risks. Rokeach (1968) defines values as enduring benefits that a particular end-state existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-state of existence. Values are life's drivers that cause an individual to function in all his actions (Zinas, 2013).

The linkage between values and consequences is of essential importance in the MEC model. Coolen et al. (2002) give the linkages as, firstly, that a certain good must be consumed or used to realize a desirable consequence; secondly, it is the linkage between consequences and the attributes of goods. This qualitative approach was used to identify and represent the content and structures of consumer models for products and brands. Gutman's MEC theory (1982) was inspired by research from Rokeach (1968), and Yankelovich (1981) who showed that values direct people's behavior in all aspects of their lives (Boer & McCarthy, 2004). Although MEC original purpose was for linking consumers' values to their choice behavior in marketing and consumer research, it is becoming popular in other areas (Tania et al., 2006) like architecture, urban design, advertising, information technology, and organizational management (Rugg et al., 2002).

The conceptual model of MEC theory can be abridged in the following suggestions (Pieters et al., 1991): firstly, that the subjective familiarity about consumers' goods and services is ordered in associative set of connections; secondly, that the ideas in these set of connections that are pertinent for consumer decision-making are characteristics of products, benefits from these products after use, and consumers' values; thirdly, that characteristics of products, benefits from these products and values are ordered hierarchically; and fourthly, that the cognitive structures of consumers about products and services determine appropriate consumer behavioral actions (Pieters et al., 1991; Coolen & Hoekstra, 2001). MEC utilizes the laddering technique for data collection, analysis and interpretation (Jusan, 2007; Coolen & Hoekstra, 2001).

Laddering Technique

Laddering refers to an in-depth one-on-one interviewing technique used to develop an understanding of how consumers translate the attributes into meaningful associations with respect to self, following means-end theory (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Reynolds and Whitlark (1995) describe it as an interviewing technique that can be used to elicit means-end connections and attribute-consequence-value networks people use when making decisions about life's endeavors. It is qualitative in nature – utilizing a semi-structured interviewing tool aimed at eliciting responses from respondents' perception on the attribute consequence-value (A-C-V) elements (Jusan, 2007). Reynolds and Gutman (1988) assess that laddering involves a tailored interviewing format using primarily a series of directed probes, typified by the "why is that important to you?" question, with the express goal of determining sets of linkages between the key perceptual elements across the range of attributes (A), consequences (C), and values (V). Costa et al., (2004) describe it as face-to-face, individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews aiming at the elicitation of the attribute-consequence-value associations consumers hold regarding the object(s) under study (Costa et al., 2004).

Laddering, which is unquestionably a useful technique for identifying the relevant attributes and life values in a particular product domain, and for studying the complexities of consumers' cognitive structures with respect to that domain, can fruitfully be combined with a questionnaire technique in eliciting responses from housing users to establish their choice behaviors (Zinas & Jusan, 2014). Several researchers (Jusan, 2007; Tania

et al., 2006; Costa et al., 2004; Coolen & Hoekstra, 2001; Gengler & Reynolds, 1995; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) are unanimous that content analysis tool is the core of the analytical procedure in a means-end study.

METHODOLOGY
Elicitation of Neighborhood Attributes

A laddering interview was conducted with fifteen (15) dwellers of a neighborhood of Sangere – a university settlement. The selection criteria for the respondents were on two levels; firstly, desire of the respondent to stay for a while and secondly, willingness to oblige an interview. The interviews were conducted with each of the interviewees in a relaxed and conducive atmosphere. Two methods of recording were simultaneously carried out: digital recording and notes taking. The digital recordings were conducted with a 4-gigabyte capacity GIONEE P2 phone. It provided the research advantage of listening to the recorded data as soon as the interviews session was over. The recorded interviews range from 30minutes to 45minutes on the average for each of the interviewees. This digital recording device was very handy, convenient as posited by Roulston (2010), it is "easy to carry" around and has lengthy recording times. The note taking as posited by Jusan (2007) "is not meant to duplicate the recordings" by the digital device, but are used as "On-site data processing", which allows the interviewer to summarize the information that help to keep in constant touch with the data collection. The recorded interviews were transcribed into textual data and content analyzed. The analysis was done manually through the stages outlined by different works of researchers (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988; Coolen & Hoekstra, 2001; Tania et al., 2006, and Jusan, 2007) in line with the requirement of MEC model.

Content analysis was used as the method for analyzing the data generated from the laddering 'interviews. Weber (2004) describes content analysis as a research 'method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from texts. The content analysis of the transcribed data was done within the context of that outlined by the traditional MEC methods (Reynold and Gutman, 1988) and Weber's (2004) methods. The basic elements of analysis of the study is "word", "sense of sentence" and "sense of phrases" as posited by Jusan (2010).

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the findings from the laddering interviews. The findings from these interviews were fist transcribed from voice recorded data into textual data. This was then categorized into Attributes-Consequence-Value elements as profiled in table 1 below. The numbers in parenthesis represent the frequency of mention of the categorized elements. For example, the attribute 'family set up' was mentioned eleven times, while the attribute 'proximity' was mentioned thirteen times. The categorized attribute 'family set up' produced four (4) categorized consequences (protection, togetherness, encouragement & moral check) as well as four (4) motivating personal values elements of security, hedonism (happiness), benevolence (true friendship) and universalism (acceptance).

Table 1: Categorization of elements mentioned

S/No	Attributes	Consequences	Values
1	Family set up (11)	Protection (3) Togetherness (2) Encouragement (2) Moral check (4)	Security (S) Happiness (HD) True friendship (B) Acceptance (U)
2	Proximity (13)	Punctuality (4) Cost reduction (5) Attend weekly activities often (4)	Satisfaction (HD) Self discipline (C) Good generation (A)
3	Accessibility (8)	Easy passage (5) Encourage visitation (3)	Comfort (HD) True friendship (B)
4	Quietness (14)	Meditation (4) Privacy (4) Concentration (6)	Success (A) Independence (SD) Ambition (A)
5	Terrain (7)	No flooding (2) Suitable for games (3) Greenery and rocky (2)	Family security (S) Pleasure (HD) Unity with nature (U)
6	Not overcrowded (12)	Less crime (4) Less pollution (3) Good ventilation (3) Cleanliness (2)	Family safety (S) Conducive environment (HD) Comfort (HD)

Source: field survey, 2016.

The categorized attribute 'proximity' produced three (3) categorized consequences elements (punctuality, cost reduction, & attend weekly activities often) as well as three (3) motivating user values elements of achievement (good generation), hedonism (satisfaction), and conformity (self discipline).

The categorized attribute 'accessibility' (eight elements) created only two categorized consequences elements (easy passage and encourage visitation) and also two motivating user values elements of hedonism (comfort), and benevolence (true friendship). 'Quietness' categorized attribute produced three categorized benefits elements of 'meditation', 'privacy' and 'concentration'. This attribute also activated user values of self-direction (independence) and achievement (success and ambition). The preference for categorized 'terrain' neighborhood attribute produced consequence elements of 'no flooding', a place 'suitable for games' and a 'greenery and rocky' terrain. This activated personal user values of security (family security), hedonism (pleasure) and universalism (unity with nature). 'Un-overcrowded' categorized neighborhood attribute was mentioned with connection to the following categorized benefits: "less crime", "less pollution", "good ventilation", and "cleanliness". These provoked two user values of security (family safety) and hedonism (conducive environment and comfort).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result (Table 2) revealed that eleven (11) elements were mentioned with respect to neighborhood perceived as place for 'family set up'. This will bring closeness to family which in turn will promote family ties, relationship and connectivity. That engenders 'family set up' preference in their neighborhood. People prefer to stay in neighborhoods that will guarantee security, encourage togetherness and ensures moral upbringing of family members.

 "Protection" stands as the intervening expected functional affordance (consequence). It is found that protection for the neighborhood residents brings a level of satisfaction with regard to crime rate, free movement at night and house burglary. This provokes motivating user values of Security (S). Also, social relation / support (Encouragement, Togetherness and Moral check) were other reasons given by the respondents for preferring a neighborhood. Two (2) consequence elements were associated to "encouragement", with regard to their staying in the neighborhood; two (2) elements were mentioned with respect to "togetherness" and four (4) elements were associated to "moral check" of the neighborhood. The motivating user values to these consequences are benevolence (B), Stimulation (ST) and universalism (U). The finding is in agreement with that of Elizabeth and Robert (2012) and Erase Racism

(2012) who observed in their studies that sense of belonging (social relation/support) indicates the degree to which residents identify themselves as part of the immediate larger community, as such a relevant factor for neighborhood satisfaction. Hamam et al. (2013) posited that the higher the social disorder in a given society, community or neighborhood, the more likelihood those residents will feel more vulnerable to crime and its consequences. As could be seen from the results, respondents attached significance to protection and social relation/ support (Encouragement, Togetherness and Moral check) in their neighborhood preference.

Closeness to neighborhood facilities and amenities contribute largely to neighborhood preference and choice. This attribute was connected to punctuality to services, meetings and other related neighborhood requirements. Four (4) consequence elements were mentioned in connection to this. 'Cost reduction' was another consequence elements connected to proximity. If the distance to neighborhood facilities and other associated services is short, it will reduce the cost required to attend to these services. This will encourage regular attendance of these activities on a daily and/or weekly basis. Three motivating user values of hedonism (satisfaction), conformity (self-discipline), and achievement (good generation) were provoked as motivation drivers of the neighborhood preference.

Findings revealed that an easily accessible neighborhood will enhance "easy passage" of personnel, goods and services. It will also "encourage visitation" to friends and the neighborhood community. Two user values of hedonism (comfort) and benevolence (true friendship) were found as motivating factors for the neighborhood preference and choice. "Quietness" neighborhood attribute was found to be connected to the benefit of "meditation", "privacy" and having to be "concentrating". A relatively quiet neighborhood will promote self-development at all levels. User values of achieving success, being ambitious (Achievement), and independence (self-direction) were found to motivate these preferences. The "terrain" of a neighborhood that is not prone to "flooding", "suitable for game" and has a "greenery and rocky" is found to be preferred. These choices were motivated by three motivating user values of security (family security), hedonism (pleasure) and universalism (unity with nature).

The quality of a neighborhood that is "not overcrowded" is found to be preferred. This kind of neighborhood is viewed to convey benefits of "less crime", "less pollution" of the air and noise, and will have "good ventilation" within the neighborhood. Fresh air circulation will be inhaled in the neighborhood community which will enhance healthy living. These attribute and consequences were motivated by user values of hedonism (comfort & conducive environment), and security (family safety).

CONCLUSION

It is imperative that neighborhoods are designed and planned to bring maximum livability of the residents. A neighborhood that is not planned to curb or reduce crime to the barest minimum will be a place prospective residents will avoid to stay. It is significant for neighborhood to be planned with accompanying neighborhood centers that will house community services like educational, health, and sports facilities.

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