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# Effect of Safety Protocols on Customer Patronage of Hotels in Anambra State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the effect of safety protocols on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to ascertain the effect of cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of interest in this study is infinite, comprised of all hotel customers in Anambra State. A sample size of 384 hotel customers was drawn using Cochran's formula. The sample hotels and respondents were selected through simple random and judgmental sampling techniques respectively. Primary data for the study were collected using structured questionnaire. Frequency tables and percentages were employed in presenting and analysis of data, while multiple regressions were employed in testing of the hypotheses at 0.05 significant levels. The results indicated that the two majoring construct - cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing had positive significant effects on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State of Nigeria. The study concluded that safety protocols have significant positive effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State. The study therefore, recommended that hotels should continue to improve on cleanliness and hygiene by adopting more innovative measures such as the use of technology, effective cleansing agents and techniques. Also recommended was that hotels should keep on implementing social distancing measures as well as adopting some contactless service technologies to assure customers of their safety as this will boost customer confidence leading to enhanced patronage.

**Keywords:** Safety Protocols, Cleanliness and Hygiene, Social Distancing, Customer Patronage, Epidemics.

## INTRODUCTION

Epidemic is often a common occurrence in the world with its ruinous clinical and economic effects globally. An epidemic can be seen as the outbreak of disease that affect a great number of persons/individual and human activities within a locality. Epidemic outbreak is not new in the history of the world, but has been part of human history. According to Hung, Mark, Yeung, Chan and Graham (2018), local outbreak of diseases are becoming pandemics because of increase and constant movement of people from one place to another and from one country to the other. Outbreak of Infectious diseases can be said to be a constant threat in the society, since man interacts with each other and engage in various activities and as a result come in contact with other living beings. Ojo (2022) stated that epidemic or pandemic has

been in existence in the history of the world with such names as disease, plague, pestilence or polluting disease. Ozbay, Sariisik, Ceylan and Caemak (2021) observed that epidemic outbreaks that have occurred in history have cost loss of lives and have many psychological, economic and sociological effects. These constitute obvious challenges to both humans and opportunities to businesses (Buhaji & Ahmed, 2020).

At different times and at different locations/places, different epidemics has been recorded including Ebola, Yellow-fever, chicken-pox, Small-pox, Lassa-fever, Cholera, Swine-flu etc. and more recently, Covid-19 (corona virus). In effect and to a large extent, various governments of various countries as well as world bodies, societies, and businesses put in place varying safety measures also known as safety protocols at different times to stem, and possibly, contain the spread and also protect citizens and customers/employees against associated illnesses and injuries. Safety protocols may be seen as activities and precautions taken to improve safety and reduce risk in the society.

In hotels, health and safety protocols are set of measures hoteliers use to protect its employees and customers. This is very vital to their operations given that the business involves high person-to-person contact as a result of which their operations are seriously affected whenever there is epidemic outbreak as witnessed globally during past incidents including Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Covid-19 etc. During Corona virus incidence for instance, measures including lock-down, social-distancing, constant hand-washing, use of sanitizers etc. were deployed to curb the effects of the disease which affected virtually all spheres of the economy, hotels inclusive. Against this backdrop therefore, the present study seeks to ascertain the effect of safety protocols on customer patronage of holes during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State of Nigeria using cleanliness and hygiene, and social-distancing, as the independent variables.

Hotel is an integral and essential part of the hospitality industry and service sector. In recent years, there is no doubt that the sector has been witnessing radical changes leading to improvement in the standard of living of people and economic development globally. Coker (2021) observed that hospitality and tourism industry in 2018 contributed about nine trillion dollars ($9tm) to the world gross domestic product (GDP) and provided about three hundred and thirty million (330) jobs globally. He also noted that the sector in Nigeria has kept over ten thousand (10,000) small and medium scale enterprises preoccupied. According to Jumia Travel (2017), hospitality and tourism sector contributed 4.8 percent to Nigeria's GDP in 2016 and employed about 1.6 percent of Nigerians in the same year. Bello and Bello (2021) observed that hospitality industry generated about six hundred and fifty one (651,000) jobs directly for Nigerians in 2015, which stands at 1.6 percent. According to Statista (2022) hospitality industry contributed 4.4% and 2.8% to Nigerian's GDP in 2019 and 2020 respectively reflecting an obvious drop. From all indications, the drop witnessed in the year 2020 may have been as a result of the impact of covid-19 pandemic, which is an indication that epidemic outbreak can have a negative impact on the economy.

The contribution of the hospitality industry to the development of many national economies notwithstanding, it can still safely be argued that the sector may have suffered fluctuations at different times as a result of issues and events emanating from the external environment, including terrorism, natural disaster, economic recession, and disease outbreaks. When there is outbreak of disease that can be transmitted through contact, the fear of contamination of the disease usually calls for reduction in unnecessary contact which affects the

hospitality industry (Choirisa & Rizkalla, 2021; Lau, Yang, Pang, Tsui, Wong &Yun, 2005).

From all indications, it can be seen that epidemic outbreak affects all aspect of human activities, including the activities and operations of hotels globally. Anambra State is not an exemption from the mix. During the recent covid-19 outbreak, the series of restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of the virus crumbled business activities, mostly in high contact businesses like hotel. Within the period, observations show that hotels in Anambra State seemingly witnessed low customer patronage which may be attributed to not only restrictions/protocols, but also the fear of being infected by the disease. Therefore, this study is undertaken to investigate the effect of safety protocols on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State of Nigeria.

The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of safety protocols on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study is set to: Evaluate the extent to which hygiene and cleanliness affected customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State; Determine the extent to which social distancing affected customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. Hypothetically, Hygiene and cleanliness did not affect customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State; Social distancing did not affect customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cleanliness and Hygiene

Cleanliness and hygiene are part of prerequisite to ensure good health in humans as such very essential to successful hotel operations. Cleanliness and hygiene have been widely discussed by previous researchers around the world as a strategy for hotel industry recovery after a health crisis (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020; Devana, Christianto, Christianto, Setjoadi, Vincent, & Widjojo (2022). Cleanliness and hygiene in hotel are measured by observing the level of cleanliness of the hotel facilities (Devana et al, 2022). The high touch or frequently touched surfaces and public spaces such as; public toilets, elevator buttons, keys, door handles, TV remotes, light switches, etc. needed to be constantly cleaned and disinfected (Neog, 2021; Mangco & Andales, 2023; Devana et al 2020; Gumaster & Bhosle, 2019). Neog (2021) noted that cleaning is the first step in any disinfection process since it aids to remove diseases on contaminated areas. Mangco and Andales (2023) stated that cleanliness does not just mean removing of dirt, stains, dust etc. from surfaces, but include disinfecting.

Gupta, Roy, Chlebra, Sanchez and Sahu (2022) in their study observed that consumers are increasingly worried about sanitation and therefore call on hotel operators to ensure that the hotel environments are not only visually clean but also should be sanitized to medical grade cleanliness to assure the trust of the guests. Sharmas and Kaushi (2021) in their study found that improved cleanliness and sanitation are very necessary to avoid spreading of infections and keep customers and employees safe. Noy and Shield (2019) asserted that SARS outbreak in Hong Kong was linked to poor sanitation facilities. Ning and Shin (2022); Bagnera, Datton, Ezende and Legg (2022); Ariffin, Romli, Khalid, Musa and Anuar (2023); Mangco and Andales (2023); Gumaste and Bhosle (2019); and Neog (2021) in their separate studies found that cleanliness and hygiene are the major factors consumers consider when choosing a hotel for stay. Similarly, Peric, Dramicanin and Conic (2022) observed that cleanliness and hygiene have been taken serious in the hotel industry since the SARS outbreak in 2003.

## Social Distancing

Social distancing entails maintaining reasonable distance between people. On 25th August, 2020, WHO advised that people maintain a physical distance of at least one (1) meter between them; and for the accommodation sector, the institution should provide physical barriers between employees and customers such as use of a protective plexiglass board at reception and concierge desk. It has been observed that consumers prefer restaurants that use partitions to separate each customer as a social distancing measure (Vandenhaute, Gellynck, & De Steur, 2022). Use of physical barriers to partition larger spaces to make space for different customers were regarded as safer, cleaner and more sanitary (Vandenhaute et al., 2022). Neog (2021) also noted that putting up physical barriers between the employees and customers is a good measure to limit infection. There is evidence that infectious disease like covid-19 can be transmitted through contact, so limiting contact between people is seen as an effective measure in controlling the transmission (Guner, Hasanoglu & Aktas, 2020). Amani (2021) found that hotels changed their seating arrangements to make sure there is reasonable distance between table setups in dining areas in order to discourage close contact between people. Implementation of social distancing measures by an organization safeguards the health of everybody concerned and encourages customers to revisit again (Vandenhanute et al., 2022). Li (2022) noted that during covid-19, lower rates of transmission and mortality are linked with increased implementation of social distancing and reduced travel mainly though public transit. Therefore when facilities do not permit adequate physical distancing, reduced occupancy rate should be considered.

## Customer Patronage

The act of consumer buying goods and services from a particular enterprise is referred to as customer patronage. Acee-Eke and Ogonu (2020) posited that customer patronage provides the basis for stable and growing market share. The term customer patronage has been defined by various authors in the academic world. Adiele, Greid and Ezirim (2015) defined customer patronage as the customers' efforts to purchase a firm's goods and services on a regular basis. According to Kabuoh, Onia, Oundiwin and Erigbe (2020) customer patronage is a passionate obligation exhibited by a customer to consistently adhere to a particular brand and repurchase the product no matter what the situation is, due to already established brand loyalty. Njelita and Anyasor (2020) asserted that patronage in marketing can be seen as an exchange process that involves two parties, the giver and the receiver. The giver (business organization) must have something of value (goods or services) to offer to the receiver (consumer/customer), who will pay money or offer something in exchange for the goods or services received. From the above definitions, it is clear that people purchase or patronize organization's goods and services at different times and for various reasons to satisfy their needs and wants. However, the extent to which an individual will patronize an organization depends on how he/she perceives the organization's physical environment (servicescape) and how the individual also thinks and feels that the condition of the service environment is consistent with his/her personality (Adiele & Opara, 2014; Adiele et al, 2015).

In today's competitive world, satisfying customers should be the main aim of any organization that wants to sustain patronage (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). Customers urge to purchase /patronize a product is burn out of the desire for satisfaction (Njelita & Anyasor, 2020). Customer patronage demeanor can be measured by a variety of factors which include devotion, sum of money spent, reorder rate, number of visits, extent of satisfaction, time taken and amount of goods purchased (Umeanyika, Eze, Anyasor & Anetoh, 2021).

Repositioning of product is also vital in achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty. This is necessary to change the organization's image in order to take a new place and value in the customer's mind. As noted by Chendo, Oguanobi and Anyaegbunam (2025) repositioning can help businesses gain competitive edge by encouraging patronage and ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty. Organizations in the service industry such as hotels can improve customers purchase behaviour by creating value in their product offerings to meet customers' expectations and satisfy their needs (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). In addition, Kabuoh et al (2020) state that the satisfaction customers derived from goods or services offered by an organization will improve patronage and loyalty. Satisfaction has greater influence in customer loyalty because when organizations attach more value to the expectations of its customers, then it derives the customer loyalty (Sarwar, Abbasi & Pervaiz, 2012). Adiele et al, (2015) noted that there exists strong bond between patronage and loyalty, as patronage emanate as a desire to be committed to an organization either as a result of its service quality or perceived service qualities.

Loyalty can be seen as the response that reflected buyers' continuous purchasing behaviour to embark on repeat purchase, stick with the same brand and convey positive information about the brand. Therefore, there is need for hotels to always strive to improve their services beyond customers' expectations for enhanced customer experience that will lead to customer loyalty.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive research design (the survey). This is because survey research is seen as being appropriate for research in management science and related fields. The population is considered infinite given that no database of the target subjects exists. The study population is made up of patrons of hotels in Anambra State, since it is impossible for the researcher to study the entire population Cochran's formula known as Z-score was used to determine the study's sample size which is 384. The sample hotels and respondents were selected through simple random and judgmental sampling technique respectively. In the course of the study the researcher generated data from primary source.

The data was generated with the aid of the questionnaire that was distributed to the study sample the customers of hotels in Anambra State. The structured questionnaire used in this study was constructed based on the literature review, the objective and hypotheses of this study. The questionnaire has two sections A and B. Section A contains questions on the demographic variables of the respondents while, section B contains questions used to examine the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The questionnaire was constructed on a 4 point Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was subjected to face, content, and construct validation. In order to achieve this, the draft questionnaire was given to three experts, along with the objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses. The task of the experts was to assess the questionnaire to make sure that it covers what is required for the study (content validity) and also appealing on the surface (face validity). The questionnaire was administered to twenty (20) customers of hotels in Ihiala town in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, within the interval of two weeks in a pilot study to check for the instruments' reliability. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha tests are above 0.70 indicating high level of reliability, hence the instrument was considered valid for the study.

Three hundred and eighty four copies of the questionnaire were distributed to customers of hotels in Anambra State. Hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis at 0.05 levels of significant, with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25. Decision rule is to accept $H_o$ if the P-value is greater than 0.05, if not reject $H_o$ and accept $H_A$. Accept $H_A$ if the P-value is less than or equal to 0.05, if not, reject $H_A$ and accept $H_o$.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1: Cleanliness and Hygiene**

| S/N | Statement | Strongly Disagree(SD) 1 | Disagree (D) 2 | Agree (A) 3 | Strongly Agree (SA) 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Keeping of the hotel's environment clean | - | 4 (1.1%) | 162 (44.1%) | 201(54.8%) |
| 2. | Keeping of hotel rooms and toilets clean always | 2 (0.5%) | 4(1.1%) | 161(43.9%) | 200(54.5%) |
| 3. | Tidying up of restaurant and lobby always | - | 5(1.4%) | 161(43.9%) | 201(54.8%) |
| 4. | Regular use of disinfectants/sanitizers to clean facilities | 4(1.1%) | 14(3.8%) | 134(36.5%) | 215(58.6%) |
| 5. | Use of posters and signs to remind customers to maintain good hygiene standards | 4(1.1%) | 22(6.0%) | 136(37.1%) | 205(56.9%) |

The Table 1 above revealed that 4(1.1%) hotel customers disagreed that hotels are always keeping their environment clean, while 162(44.1%) and 201(54.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that hotels environment are always clean.

The results also revealed that when the customers were asked about always keeping of hotel rooms and toilets clean 2(0.5%) strongly disagreed while 4(1.1%) disagreed. On the other hand, 161(43.9%) of customers agreed, while 200(54.5%) strongly agreed that hotels always keep their rooms and toilets clean.

The customers were also asked whether hotels always tidy up their restaurants and lobby. The result revealed that 5(1.4%) disagreed, while 161(43.9%) and 201(54.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that hotels always tidy up their restaurants and lobby.

The results show that 4(1.1%) strongly disagreed that hotels regularly use disinfectants/sanitizers to clean facilities while 14(3.8%) disagreed. Then, 134(36.5%) and 215(58.6%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that hotels always use disinfectants/sanitizers to clean facilities.

The results on whether hotels use posters and signs to remind customers to maintain good hygiene standards revealed that 4(1.1%) and 22(6%) strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. On the other hand 136(37.1%) agreed while 205(56.9%) strongly agreed that

hotels use posters and signs to remind customers to maintain good hygiene standards.

In summary, 98.9% of the respondents agreed that hotels keep their environment clean while 98.4% of them agreed that hotel rooms and toilets are always clean. Furthermore, 98.7% agreed that hotels always tidy up their restaurants and lobby. In terms of regular use of disinfectants/sanitizers to clean facilities the result revealed that 94.1% agreed. Also the results revealed that 94.0% agreed that posters and signs were used as reminders to customers to maintain good hygiene. Next is result on social distancing.

**Table 2: Social Distancing**

| S/N | Statement | SD<br>1 | D<br>2 | A<br>3 | SA<br>4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Observation of adequate distancing between sitting arrangements | 1(0.3%) | 27(7.4%) | 215(58.6%) | 124(33.8%) |
| 2. | Discouragement of large crowd. | 18(4.9%) | 102(27.8%) | 190(51.8%) | 57(15.5%) |
| 3. | Observation of social distancing between staff and customers. | 21(5.7%) | 100(27.2%) | 193(52.2%) | 53(14.4%) |
| 4. | Use of sign and posters as reminders to keep adequate distance | 13(3.5%) | 69(18.8%) | 164(44.7%) | 121(33%) |
| 5. | Offer of some contactless services to keep adequate distance. | 10(2.7%) | 33(9%) | 158(43.1%) | 166(45.2%) |

The results on Table 2 above show that 1(0.3%) of the respondents strongly disagree that hotels maintain adequate distancing between sitting arrangements while 27(7.4%) disagreed. The results also show that 215(58.6%) and 124(33.8%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that hotels maintain adequate distancing between sitting arrangements.

The results on Table 2 also revealed that 18(4.9%) of customers strongly disagreed that hotels discourage large crowds while 102(27.8%) disagreed. However 190(51.8%) agreed that hotels discourage large crowds while 57(15.5%) strongly agreed.

The study found that 21(5.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that hotel staff and customers maintain appropriate distancing between them meanwhile 100(27.2%) disagreed. However 193(52.2%) and 53(14.4%) of customers agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that staff and customers maintain appropriate distancing between them.

The results further show that 13(3.5%) customers strongly disagreed that hotels use signs and posters as reminders to keep adequate distancing. At the same time 69(18.8%) disagreed that signs and posters were used as reminders to keep adequate distancing. At the same time 69(18.8%) disagreed that signs and posters were used to remind customers to maintain adequate distancing. Interestingly, 164(44.7%) and 121(33.0%) of customers

agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that hotels use signs and posters ad reminder to customers to maintain adequate distancing.

Lastly, the results revealed that 10(2.7%) of respondents strongly disagreed, while 33(9.0%) disagreed that hotels offer some form of contactless services as form of social distancing. However, 158(43.1%) of respondents agreed that hotels offer contactless services as form of social distancing while 166(45.2%) strongly agreed.

In summary, 92% of hotel customers agreed that hotels observe adequate distancing between sitting arrangements. Then 67.3% agreed that hotels discourage large crowd. Also the results show that 66.6% of the customers agreed that staff and customers maintain adequate social distancing. Additionally, 77.7% of customers revealed that signs and posters were used as reminders to keep adequate distancing. Furthermore the results revealed that 88.3% of hotel customers agreed that hotels offer contactless services as a form of social distancing.

**Table 3: Customer Patronage**

| S/N | Statement | SD<br>1 | D<br>2 | A<br>3 | SA<br>4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Patronage of hotel because of cleanliness and hygiene | 1(0.3%) | 2(0.5%) | 41(11.2%) | 323(88%) |
| 2. | Patronage of hotel because of social distancing practices | 37(10.1%) | 83(22.6%) | 115(31.3%) | 132(36%) |

The results on table 3 above shows that 1(0.3%) and 2(0.5%) of hotel customers strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they would patronize hotel because of cleanliness and hygiene. Interestingly 41(11.2%) and 323(88.0%) of the customers agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they would patronize hotel because of cleanliness and hygiene.

The results also show that 37(10.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that their patronage of hotel will depend on social distancing practices. Some of the customers 83(22.6%) disagreed that they would patronize a hotel because of social distancing practices. On the other hand 115(31.3%) of the respondents agreed that they would patronize a hotel because of social distancing practices while 132(36.0%) strongly agreed.

**Table 4: Regression Model Summary Result**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .774[a] | .600 | .594 | 1.832 | 1.659 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), CH, SD,

b. Dependent Variable: CP

Table 4 shows that the regression correlation coefficient value is 0.774 (77.4%). This implies that aggregate relationship between the dependent variable and the independent

variables is strong and positive. The $R^2$ known as the coefficient of determination which measures the strength of the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable has the value of 0.600. This implies that 60% of the variation in customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak was jointly determined by safety protocol variables (CH, and SD). This was augmented by adjusted $R^2$value of 0.594 which means that despite the adjustment made; that the independent variables were able to jointly explained about (59.4%) variations on the dependent variables; leaving about 40.6% to other factors not captured or included in the regression model. Table 4 also presents the Durbin Watson test result for auto correlation. It is used to test for the presence or absence of autocorrelation among the study variables. The Durbin-Watson test result is 1.659 which reveals absence of autocorrelation among the study variables in the model.

**Table 5: Regression ANOVA Result**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 1813.865 | 5 | 362.773 | 108.085 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 1211.650 | 361 | 3.356 | | |
| | Total | 3025.515 | 366 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: CP

b. Predictors: (Constant), CH, SD

Table 5 presents the regression ANOVA result. The result demonstrated that the f-statistics value is 108.085 with its corresponding probability value of 0.000. This result shows the overall significance of the regression model. The implication of this result is that the independent variables used in this study jointly have a significant effect on the dependent variable. Therefore, CH, and SD jointly have significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State of Nigeria.

**Table 6: Regression Coefficients Results**

| **Model** | | **Unstandardized Coefficients** | | **Standardized Coefficients** | **t-value** | **P-value** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **B** | **Std. Error** | **Beta** | | | **Remark** |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.764 | .778 | | 3.554 | .000 | Significant |
| | CH | .206 | .058 | .204 | 3.858 | .004 | Significant |
| | SD | .323 | .045 | .338 | 7.252 | .000 | Significant |

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Patronage (CP)

Table 6 shows the regression coefficient result of the study variables. Considering the standardized coefficient results as shown on Table 6, CH has a positive effect given its coefficient value of 0.204; this implies that a unit increase in cleanliness/hygiene increases

customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State by 20.4%. SD has a positive effect given its coefficient value of 0.338; this implies that a unit increase in social distancing increases customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State by 33.8%.

Furthermore, Table 6 presents the t-statistics which measure the individual statistical significance of each of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Judging from the t-value result; cleanliness/hygiene (CH) has a t-value of 3.858 with a corresponding p-value of .0.004 which is statistically significant. Social distancing (SD) has a t-value of 7.252 with a p-value of .000 which is statistically significant. This implies that social distancing has a significant effect on customer (guest) patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State.

**Test of Hypotheses**

The hypotheses formulated were tested using the p-values as well as the t-statistics values of multiple regression analysis results as shown on table 6.

**Hypothesis One**

Ho: Cleanliness and hygiene has no significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

Based on Table 6 results; since cleanliness and hygiene has the t-value of 3.858 and a p-value of 0.004 which is statistically significant based on the stipulated 5% level of significance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that cleanliness and hygiene have significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

**Hypothesis Two**

Ho: Social distancing has no significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

Based on Table 6 results, social distancing has a t-value of 7.252 and a p-value of 0.000 which is statistically significant; since the p-value is less than 0.05 (5%) the stipulated level of significance for this study. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that social distancing has a significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

**Discussion of Findings**

The field survey findings on cleanliness and hygiene showed that hotel patrons agreed that hotels keep their environment clean, rooms and toilets clean, tidy restaurants and lobby, use sanitizers/disinfectants to clean, use of signage as reminder to maintain good hygiene. This implies that cleanliness and hygiene is an important safety measures that influence customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. Base on the result of hypothesis one tested, cleanliness and hygiene have significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. The finding of this study is in tandem with the finding of various scholars. For example Kordic, Zivkovic, Stankovic, & Gajic (2015); Gumaste and Bhosle (2019); Atadil and Lu (2021); Devana et al (2022); Ning and Shin (2022); Mangco and Andeles (2023) and other authors cited in the literature found that cleanliness and hygiene play an important role in achieving customer satisfaction and one of the major elements for consideration when choosing a hotel. Gumaste and Bhosle (2019); Alfaro-Nevarro and Andres-Martinez (2024); and Genc (2024) observed that cleanliness and hygiene are the most important factors when selecting a hotel. Bagnera et al (2022); Rero (2022); Hossain (2023); Lockyer (2005); Wiskulski (2023) found that cleanliness and hygiene influence customer satisfaction and leads to customer loyalty and increase in patronage intention. Also Yu, Seo, & Hyun

(2020) observed that perceived hygiene attributes influenced customer retention in hotels. Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) in their study found that cleanliness and health related issues are drivers of the new customer attitudes in hospitality industry. The importance of cleanliness and hygiene in the hotel and hospitality industry has also been emphasized by hotel staff and management (Kenny & Dutt 2021; Garrido-Moreno, Garcia-Morales, & Martin Rojas, 2021; Rero 2022; Zhou Liu, Wang, Wang, & Wang, 2022; Nekova 2023; Diaz-pompa. Estevez-Matos, Santos-Assan, & Lopez-Baster 2023; Youssef & Mohamed, 2023). Therefore this study agrees with these various authors that cleanliness and hygiene are important drivers of customer's patronage intentions.

The field survey findings on social distancing revealed that consumers agreed that hotels observe adequate distancing between sitting arrangements, discourage large crowd, observe social distancing between staff and customers, use sign and posters as reminders to keep adequate distance. This implies that social distancing is an important factor that affects customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. Based on the result of hypothesis two tested social distancing has positive significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. The finding of this study aligns with previous research Kenny and Dutt (2021), Garrido-Moreno et al.(2021); Perez, Alonso, & Rodriguez (2021); Peric et al. (2022); Kralikova, Ryglova, & Zamecnik (2022); Seric, Mikulic, & Dosen (2022), Verma, Dash, & Mishra (2022); Vandenhaute et al (2022); Serrano-Baena, Fernandez, Ruiz-Diaz, & Trivino-Tarradas (2023) and other authors in the literature which suggests that hotels and other hospitality institutions observe social distancing as safety measures. Marques et al. (2022) noted that social distancing is vital in preventing and controlling the spread of infectious diseases by minimizing interactions between people. This implies that maintaining adequate physical distancing between people in hotels will ensure customers of their safety thereby increase their chance of repeat patronage. Seric et al.(2022); Vandenhaute et al. (2022); Serrano-Baena et al.(2023) found that social distancing has significant influence on patronage intention. Also Wang, Yao, & Martin (2021) found that US consumers are sensitive to crowdedness as slight crowded dining environment lead to decrease in their patronage intention. Therefore, this study agrees that social distancing is an important safety protocol measure that influence customer patronage during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State.

## Implication to Research and Practice

Researchers in the academic world have been devoting more time to understanding the impact of epidemics on hospitality industry since the outbreak of covid-19. The present study attempted to address the issue of how safety protocols adopted in the hotel industry during epidemic outbreaks affected customer patronage of hotels in Anambra State, Nigeria.

However there seems to be a general view on the significant impact of safety protocols on consumers during epidemic outbreak, yet empirical evidence regarding their impact on customer patronage of hotels are still sufficient. Precisely, there seem to be no prior available research on the effect of safety protocols on customer patronage of hotels in Anambra State, Nigeria. Hence, this study adopted qualitative research method in examining the effect of cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State. The findings of the study revealed that cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing have positive significant effect on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State.

In light of these findings the study recommends that hotels should continue to improve on cleanliness and hygiene by adopting more innovative measures such as the use of technology, effective cleansing agents and techniques. Also recommended was that hotels should keep on implementing social distancing measures as well as adopting some self-service technologies to assure customers of their safety as this will boast customer confidence leading to enhanced patronage.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreak in Anambra State. The study adopted descriptive research method (survey) to gather data from hotel customers in Anambra State. The data generated was analyzed with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 25. The findings of this study have demonstrated that positive and significant influences exist between cleanliness and hygiene, and social distancing on customer patronage of hotels during epidemic outbreaks in Anambra State.

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