

CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE IN POST COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

The study investigated challenges and remedies of the hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State in Post Covid-19 Era. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of the 100,000 workers in the 5,000 hospitality industries in the State. A sample size of 382 workers was used for data collection based on Krejice and Morgan sample model. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting 128 workers in hospitality industries from each of the three Senatorial Districts in the study area. A structured questionnaire titled: Issues and Challenges of Hospitality Industries Questionnaire (ICHIQ). Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by three experts to ensure that the instrument was reliable and capable of measuring the variables desired in the study. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the reliability index, and the instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.88. Data obtained was analysed using simple percentages. Findings revealed that the type of hospitality industry most affected by the COVID pandemic in the study were hotels and suites 25%; the result also showed that the social impacts in the hospitality industries was: slow international economic recovery 23.56% while the remedy for the challenges discovered was promotion of tourism by the state board 20.68%. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that hospitality industries should carry out market researches on customer perceptions and changing consumption demands and adjust their services accordingly.

Keywords: Challenges, Remedies, Hospitality Industry, Post Covid-19, Social Implications

Introduction

Hospitality industry is one of the business industries that has added value to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product. Hospitality industry explains all businesses that is responsible for the provision of accommodation, food, drinks, and other supplementary services required by vacationers including, assurance of reasonable degree of comfort, safety, and above all, adequate relaxations (Bello and Bello, 2020). According to Robert, et al. (2007), hospitality industry as a wide range of businesses such as Hotels, Restaurants, Casinos, Fast Food, and Clubs among others aimed at providing accommodation (i.e., Lodging), and food services as well as other related catering services for people when away from home. Hospitality industry is defined as those internationally impactful industry with wide cross section components of products such as accommodation (Bello and Majebi, 2018), food and beverages (Anthony et al. 2004; Jennifer and Thea, 2013; UNWTO, 2016) and other related services. The index in the above information shows that hospitality industry consists of service-oriented industry that is responsible for the provision of away

from home catering services to tourists and travellers.

Hospitality industry globally and Covid-19 pandemics are bi-directionally linked in a cause-and-effect manner (Poulos et al., 2018). The industry is both the main contributor to disease spread and a recipient of its consequences. It is worthy of note that the emergence, re-emergence and spread of epidemics and pandemics such as the 'Spanish Flu' of 1918 to 1919, 'Asian Flu' (H2N2) of 1957, the 'Hong Kong flu' of 1968, SARS in 2002 to 2003, 'Bird flu' in 2009, MERS of 2012, and Ebola of 2013-2014 (Wu et al., 2017; Gössling et al., 2020) severely impacted on the hospitality economies globally. The negative impacts of emergence and resurgence of COVID-19 is not an exception. However, since the scope of the current study focuses on the impacts of the pandemic on the Nigeria's hospitality industry, disease spreading element of the industry in Nigeria context is out of scope of the current study. Hence, the corresponding impacts of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and now the re-surgency of its second wave on the

Nigeria's hospitality industry is worth discussing thus the following.

The hospitality industry is dealing with an unprecedented crisis due to the disruption caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges created by COVID-19 impacts almost every part of a hospitality business operation, revenue generation, room occupancy levels, staffing plans, and food and beverage provisions among others as further explained below.

For instance, hotel revenue before emergence of Covid-19 in Nigeria expanded at 22.6% compound annual rate of \$US1.1 billion in 2018 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018).

Hotels are the first to be affected in the hospitality industry because restrictions on domestic and international travel directly affect their core business (Chen et al., 2007). For example, restaurant activity can be partially maintained with delivery or take-away services. With millions suddenly unemployed, uncertainty over economic recovery, and global fears of the continuing COVID-19 spread and its future waves, the hospitality industry was among the first industries affected, and it will be among the last industries to recover (Tappe and Luhby, 2020). On January 20, 2020, the United States reported its first COVID-19 confirmed case (Kretchmer, 2020). In February and through March 2020, the pandemic began to exact unprecedented economic and social consequences. Since public health concerns started to escalate in mid-February 2020, U.S. hotels have lost room revenues (AHLA, 2020). Since August 2020, almost half of the hotel industry's employees are still not working, and five out of ten rooms are empty.

The Pre-Covid-19 statistics on hotel occupancies in Nigeria show that Nigeria's hotel industry accounted for 49.8%, 44.7%, 43.6%, 42.4%, and 42.6% of occupancies in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018). This, however, implies that demand for hotel accommodation, for instance, is on the average. However, recent statistics show that "the slow pick up of international travel, restrictions on large gatherings, the switch to virtual meetings, and fear of the virus have further reduced demand for hotels in Nigeria, thus steeping occupancy levels to their lowest – less than 5%" (Nairametrics, 2020). The implications of this are that Nigeria's hospitality industry is seriously losing demand for its major

products. Hence, the physical capacity of hotel facilities in Nigeria is underutilized.

The novel coronavirus pandemic, also known as COVID-19, has severely impacted businesses and industries in several countries throughout the world. According to the World Health Organization (2020), the disease known as Coronavirus Disease-2019 was caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) (COVID-19). According to phylogenetic study, the virus is closely linked to the bat coronavirus RaTG13. Common symptoms include fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, myalgias, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, headache, weakness, and rhinorrhea. Anosmia or ageusia may be the sole presenting symptom in individuals with COVID-19.

In relation to Nigeria, the first pandemic case was reported on February 27, 2020 (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020). However, examination of the current Covid-19 infection and mortality rates in Nigeria as of December 28, 2020, reveals that there were about 85 000 confirmed infection cases reported, with 1,264 fatality rates (The Voice of Africa, 2020; Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020). Due to Nigeria's low testing capacity, it is crucial to remember that the true infection rate of COVID-19 cases in the nation is yet unknown. Due to Nigeria's low testing capacity, it is crucial to remember that the true infection rate of COVID-19 cases in the nation is yet unknown. The Nigerian government has turned to non-pharmaceutical methods to try and stop the virus from spreading because there is currently no vaccine for it. These methods include wearing a face mask, self-quarantining, and social isolation, border closures, and local lockdowns among others. The corresponding effects of these infection spread management strategies led to shutdown of businesses including, the hospitality industry.

It is pertinent to state that the growth rate of Nigeria's hospitality industry in pre Covid-19 era is unprecedented (Bello, 2018). For instance, Hotels been one of the critical industries in the Nigeria hospitality industry attracted significant investment put at over US\$3 billion in the last three years (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). In terms of contribution to the GDP, hotel industry contributed N1.7billion (\$US 5.5 million) put at 4.8% to the Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 (Ekwujuru, 2016; Jumia Travel, 2017). The industry

generated 651,000 jobs directly in 2015 put at 1.6% of total employment in the country and another 1.6% in 2016 worth N661,000 (Jumia, Travel, 2017). The Fast-food industry is another key component of the hospitality industry in Nigeria hence, generated annual revenue of N230 billion and taxes in excess of a billion naira to the Nigeria industry (Bukola, 2017). The author further opines that the fast-food industry collectively provided employment for over 500,000 people at the processing and retailing level in Nigeria in 2017. Summarily, the value of the hospitality industry in Nigeria was estimated at N1.4 trillion as at year ending 2019 (LCCI, 2020).

Despite the attractive and stabilized outlook of the Nigeria hospitality industry in the pre Covid-19 era, the emergence and resurgence of this disease were observed to have drastically affected the hospitality industry in Nigeria. It is therefore worthwhile to explore the consequences of the current pandemic on the Nigeria's hospitality industry.

Communal calamity and crisis formed by the Corona virus' wide spread led to increased discrimination, social exclusion, inequality, and world-wide joblessness for a long time. Individuals remain behind closed doors, avoiding social environments such as those associated with the hospitality industry, due to their fear of coming into contact with the virus even in the current post-COVID-19 pandemic. World-wide societal defence arrangements, when in dwelling, play a much longer-lasting part in defending workforces and in decreasing the occurrence of dearth since they act as spontaneous stabilizers. Khanwalker (2020) further explained that because of the nonstop beating of COVID-19 in the previous few months, the community at large has been overwhelmed with unparalleled anxiety and fear. The virus may disappear (confidently) later or sooner, but the effect of the suspicion that has been formed over communal connections will be enormous. Sandeep expounds how the community has altered its viewpoint in the previous 2-3 months and how the community is going to grip community proceedings like get-togethers, marriage functions etc. He examined the purpose is that everybody is frightened and, as a result, does not believe others. The author suggests that sociology specialists develop certain fundamental theories to explain such social performance and behaviour in times of widespread.

Social isolation (also known as social or physical distance) is a separation from friends, relatives, and peers in social settings, including workplaces. Closer to hotels, restaurants, and other entertaining places like bars, parks, movies, theatres, sports clubs, gymnasiums, swimming pools, etc. It is clearly seen that some methods of greetings between individuals, like handshakes and hugs, are seen as mediums for the transmission of the coronavirus. With this fear that our culture aids the transmission of the virus, humans no longer mingle with people in the hostel industry compared to the pre-covid-19 experience in the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry finds it hard to fulfil its primary purpose of socialising with different people. The tourism industry employs a great percentage of tourists and visitors from other countries and states. During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its rapid state of transmission, borders to countries were closed, making it hard for a country to accept tourists and travelers. The hospitality industry, especially the hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic, suffered great losses due to low patronage and the social status of the industry was reduced to a minimum.

To reduce customer fear of the virus in the hospitality industry, a series of post-COVID-19 actions for restaurants to take, such as island-sitting arrangements to ensure maximum physical distances between people, live cooking counters to allow customers to watch their food being prepared to instil confidence in its safety, and having appropriate hygiene and cleaning procedures throughout (Jain, 2020). Bagnera et al. 2020 investigated the impact of COVID-19 on hotel operations and recommended a series of actions for hotel owners and managers, including using fewer rooms (reducing hotel capacity); emphasising take-out or delivery options to reduce public dining; implementing intensified cleaning and sanitizing protocols; committing to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers and increasing attention to personal hygiene; communicating new COVID-19 policies to guests and employees; implementing physical distancing practises in public areas; and implementing protocols for guests exposed to or infected by COVID-19 (Bagnera et al. 2020). It should be noted that the World Health Organization (WHO) produced a guide titled "Operational Considerations for COVID-19 Management in the Accommodations Sector" to provide practical assistance to the hospitality sector in particular (World Health Organization, 2020). The report is

divided into sections for the management team, reception and concierge, technical and maintenance services, restaurants and dining rooms and bars, recreational areas for children, and cleaning and housekeeping, with a list of responsibilities to help manage the threat of COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020).

Furthermore, Jain discussed different hotel industry strategies to bring back customers, including including disposable utensils in rooms, emphasising staff health and hygiene, and using UV light to disinfect (Jain, 2020). With these controls adhered to, individuals will have confidence in their safety from the virus, even in the hospitality industry, increasing the patronage of the industry and still maintaining the sociality of individuals without further spread of the virus.

Statement of Problem

Economic recovery in the post covid-19 era has been at best slow, non-uniform and unpredictable. Some industries have recovered faster than others as well as some nations and even within nations. The hospitality industries in Akwa Ibom State have been slow to recover. This is evident in less people in parks, less hotel bookings, revenues reported and the number of new entrants to major markets like hotels. The industry is bedevilled with challenges and chronicling these challenges will make it easier to identify remedies that would be of help to the industry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges and remedies for the hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom in post covid-19 era. The specific objectives includes

1. To find out the challenges faced by hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State in Post Covid-19.
2. To examine the controls and remedies for the hospitality industry in Post Covid-19 in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State in Post Covid-19?
2. What are the controls and remedies for the hospitality industry in Post Covid-19 in Akwa Ibom State?

Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The study was undertaken in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom is one of the 36 States in Nigeria. It is located in the South-south geo political zone of Nigeria. There are numerous hospitality industries in the State which informed the basis for this study. The population of the study comprised of the 100,000 workers in the 5,000 hospitality industries in Akwa Ibom State (Akwa Ibom State Hotel and Management Board, 2022). A total of 382 workers were sampled using Krejice and Morgan sample model and used for the study. Stratified sampling technique was used to select 127 respondents in hospitality industries from each of the three Senatorial Districts in the State.

A structured instrument titled: Issues and Challenges of Hospitality Industries Questionnaire (ICHIQ) was used for data collection. Face and content validations of the instrument was carried out by three experts to ensure that the instrument the variables of the study. The instrument was administered on 30 respondents who did not form part of the study and data obtained was analysed using Cronbach Alpha statistical tool to determine the reliability index. The analysis resulted in a reliability coefficient of 0.88. The researchers with and research assistants personally administered the questionnaire and collected the filled copies on the spot. Data obtained were subjected to inferential statistics using simple percentages. In answering the research questions, the highest percentage was regarded as the significant challenge or remedy for the study and vice versa.

Results

Types of Hospitality Industries affected by covid-19 pandemic

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the types of Hospitality Industries affected by covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State

Types	Frequency	%
Hotels and suites	95	25**
Motels	30	8
Resorts	50	13
Catering	60	16
Tea and Coffee Shop	10	3*
Bars and Cafes	15	4
Restaurants	90	23
Nightclubs	20	5
Service Apartments	12	3*
Total	382	100

**** The highest percentage frequency ;* The least percentage frequency**

Table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the types of Hospitality Industries affected by covid-19 pandemic. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that hotels and suites 95(25%) was rated the highest percentage of the types of Hospitality

Industries affected by covid-19 pandemic, while tea and coffee 10(3%) was rated the least percentage of the types of Hospitality Industries affected by covid-19 pandemic.

Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State in Post Covid-19?

Table 2: Percentage analysis of COVID-19 challenges of Hospitality Industries in Akwa Ibom State

Types	Frequency	%
Low patronage of recreational centres	48	12.57
Little number of guests in the accommodation sector due to slow business activities	56	14.66
Poor patronage of restaurants	78	20.42
Slow international economic recovery due to international crisis	90	23.56**
Facility maintenance issues	45	11.78
Safety concerns of clients	30	7.85*
Health concerns of clients	35	9.16
Total	382	100

**** The highest percentage frequency; * The least percentage frequency**

The above Table 2 presents the percentage analysis of challenges of the hospitality industry in post covid-19. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that low patronage of recreational centres is 12.6%, Little number of guests in the accommodation sector due to slow business

activities had 15%. Poor patronage of restaurant is 20%, Slow international economic recovery due to international crisis had the highest percentage of 24%. Facilities maintenance issues has a percentage of 12% while safety and health concerns of clients had 8% and 9% respectively.

Research question 2: What are the controls and remedies for the hospitality industry in Post Covid-19 in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 3: Percentage Analysis of the Remedies to the challenges in the hospitality industry in post covid-19

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Promotion of tourism by the State tourism board	79	20.68**
Further investment by hotels on facility upgrade and maintenance	40	10.47
Customer friendly pricing scheme	52	13.61
Providing high quality services	60	15.71
Personalising client experience	36	9.42*
Investment in hotel technology for safety and efficiency	67	17.54
Staff training for better customer experience	48	12.57
Total	382	100

** The highest percentage frequency; * The least percentage frequency

Table 3 presents the percentage analysis of the controls and remedies for the hospitality industry in post Covid-19. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that Promotion of tourism by the State tourism board 79(21%) was rated the highest percentage of the controls and remedies. This was closely followed by Investment in hotel technology for safety and efficiency (18%). Staff training for better customer experience (13%), Customer friendly pricing scheme (14%), Providing high quality services (16%), investment by hotels on facility upgrade and maintenance (10%) and Personalising client experience (9%).

Discussion of Findings

The result of analysis identified the challenges in post COVID for the hospitality sub sector in Akwa Ibom State to include low patronage, slow business as a result slow international economic recovery, poor patronage of restaurants, facility maintenance, safety concerns and client health concerns. The finding is supported by Bello, (2020) which stated that places which fall under this sector classified based on the type of service its renders as listed.

The analysis of the findings of the study reveals the remedies for hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State. The identified remedies are Promotion of tourism by the State tourism board, Further investment by hotels on facility upgrade and maintenance, Customer friendly pricing scheme, Providing high quality services, Personalising client experience, Investment in hotel technology for safety and efficiency and Staff training for better customer experience. The result is supported by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2018) who observed that

there has been overwhelmed unparalleled anxiety and fear due to Covid-19.

The result in Table 3 revealed that the use of nose mask 95(25%) was rated the highest percentage of the controls and remedies to social implication of covid-19 pandemic in the Hospitality Industry, while formulation of new Covid-19 policies to guests and employees 10(3%) was rated the least percentage of the controls and remedies to social implication of covid-19 pandemic in the Hospitality Industry. The result is supported by Jain (2020), who opined that to reduce the fear of the virus by costumers to the hospitality industry, a series of actions for restaurants to attract customers in the post-COVID-19 period, such as including island-sitting arrangements to assure maximum physical distances between people, live cooking counters to allow customers to watch their food being prepared to instill confidence in its safety, and having appropriate hygiene and cleaning procedures throughout.

Conclusion

The research focussed on identifying post COVID challenges and remedies for the hospitality industries in post COVID era in Akwa Ibom State. The challenges faced include low patronage, slow business as a result slow international economic recovery, poor patronage of restaurants, facility maintenance, safety concerns and client health concerns. The identified remedies are promotion of tourism by the State tourism board, Further investment by hotels on facility upgrade and maintenance, Customer friendly pricing scheme,

Providing high quality services, Personalising client experience, Investment in hotel technology for safety and efficiency and Staff training for better customer experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. The hospitality industries should focus on changes in customer experiences.
2. Stakeholders in the industry should carry out market researches on customer perceptions and changing consumption demands and adjust their service accordingly.
3. Management of hospitality industries in the State should focus on quality asset management by investing in their facilities and services.
4. Investment in technology and social programmes that promote tourism should be championed all stakeholders in the industry.

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