

Challenges of Hospitality Entrepreneurship in Lokoja, Kogi State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The Hospitality industry is a complex sector, a component of economic and social life that offers multiple opportunities for small business development. The industry is capital intensive and highly competitive. Its connection with entrepreneurship takes into account its crucial roles in the economic growth, productivity gains and job creation through small businesses within the sector. In Nigeria, entrepreneurs in this sector operate in a difficult business environment. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to access the perception of the owners/managers of small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria and identify the challenges they faced in the business environment. The study adopted a qualitative approach, while purposive sampling was used to collect data through in-depth interviews from 45 owners/managers of small and medium sized hospitality establishments in Lokoja. The interviews transcripts were sorted, coded and analysed by way of thematic analysis. Findings of the study reveal the key challenges confronting the hospitality entrepreneurs in Lokoja to include; increased operating cost, infrastructural deficiency, reduced patronage and lack of supports from government. Several key strategies were suggested to tackle these challenges, among which are, government and policy-makers should play a more proactive role in promoting entrepreneurship in the city; through the creation of conducive business environment, policy formulations that are investment friendly, and technical supports. The paper concludes that hospitality entrepreneurship is a promising venture in Lokoja, Kogi State of Nigeria if the stakeholders in the sector work in synergy.

Key Words: *Entrepreneurs, Hospitality, Hotels, Enterprises*

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of entrepreneurship has attracted much attention across the world during the last three decades. It has become a major concept in the development of economy policy, political, industrial, and educational settings. For example, Henry, Hill and Leitch (2003) stated that 'it is now widely recognised that the promotion of entrepreneurship is not only necessary for a healthy economy but also critical for sustaining prosperity and creating new jobs'. Entrepreneurship has been considered as the propensity of mind to take calculated risk with confidence to achieve predetermined business objectives; 'A person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit' (Jose, 2019). The heightened interest in entrepreneurship has been as a consequence of a diverse range of contributory factors including the belief that it can act as a recipe for economic prosperity and that it can reduce unemployment. This view was shared by Lordkipanidze, Brezet and Backman (2005) that; 'entrepreneurship is a major force in economic development, since it is responsible for generating growth and acts as a vehicle for innovation and change in the economy'.

The importance of entrepreneurship pervades all sectors of the economy and all types of organisations, but industry and small businesses hold the key for economic development of any country through entrepreneurship.

The hospitality business has been acknowledged as one of the main businesses for lashing economic expansion and economic revolution in developing countries. Hence, entrepreneurship plays a vital role in tourism and hospitality industry development regionally, nationally and globally. Indeed as Shaw (2004) notes ‘there has been steady growing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship within the hospitality and tourism industry’, especially as small hospitality businesses becomes more fully understood alongside the large research literature on tourism as an element of international business. The hospitality enterprises consist of hotel business, restaurants and bars, fast food, event and entertainment services including night clubs and other related businesses. The specific objectives of this study therefore is to ; ascertain the demographic characteristics of the respondents of the study, and establish the challenges of entrepreneurs in operating hospitality enterprises in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. Finally, recommendations shall be made towards tackling the identified challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of entrepreneurship was first recognized in the 1700s, since then the denotation of entrepreneurship has developed ever since (Pahuja, 2015). The complexity of the concept of entrepreneurship gives rise to a multitude of definitions from different perspectives. Many merely define entrepreneurship as an opening one’s own business, or an entrepreneur as someone producing novel idea (Fernandes, 2016). In this context, the function of the entrepreneur can be defined as a combination, in an innovative way, of several factors, to generate value for the customer, superior returns for firms, wealth for the economy, through creating jobs and developing innovations.

Sewell and Dacre (2010) define entrepreneurship by focusing on “desire, motivation and skills” as traits “necessary to start and manage a successful business”. Hansen, Shrader and Monlam (2011), state that “the definition of entrepreneurship varies based on what opportunity is defined as”. Kobia and Sikalieh (2010) emphasize identification of entrepreneurship as innovation. It becomes evident, therefore, that any definition should include mandatory elements relating to both the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur and environmental opportunities. The term tends to be associated with economic development and the welfare of society. Entrepreneurs investigating these transformations create new channels for economic activity and employment. No business looks like another and no entrepreneur could think like one another. Hence, entrepreneurship is a necessary ingredient in the complex process of economic development, serving as a catalyst for market transformation and providing new opportunities for economic growth, employment, leading to growth in income per capita. Entrepreneurship is the utmost and an imperative facet of economic growth in the past and the contemporary era. Entrepreneurship is the motion of venturing into a new business or businesses, captivating on the risks in the optimism of making a maximum turnover. Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal part in the success of economic growth and lead to business paybacks (Nako, Dejan, Tatjana, & Oliver, 2011). In this way, entrepreneurship quality invariably leads to job creation and as such increase economic growth and development.

Entrepreneurship in hospitality

Entrepreneurship is just as relevant and important in hospitality as in other sectors of the economy if not more. Hospitality entrepreneurship is a pivotal factor in the development and growth of many national economies. The hospitality, and tourism industry is an area where discussions related to change, development, innovation and management are increasingly being couched in terms of entrepreneurship (Poulson and Pernecky 2016). Entrepreneurship is a

driver of change, innovation and employment in these industries and is crucial to meeting the rapidly changing demands of the consumers. Morrison (2002), supports this view stating that: 'Entrepreneurship is critical to the hospitality and tourism sectors, as with rapidly changing consumer demands and expectations, constant innovation by businesses is vital to meet and, hopefully, exceed these evolving demands and expectations.'

Entrepreneurship is a major factor in the ever dynamic and rapidly evolving hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism industries throughout the world. Although much of what we understand about hospitality and tourism is based on large enterprises but as some researchers have acknowledged, the growth of small firms in a number of cases may create the large company of tomorrow. This view was corroborated by Page and Connell (2006) ...'There are many important examples within the history of tourism and hospitality, such as Thomas Cook, Richard Branson, in innovating to generate significant hospitality and tourism businesses that have evolved into successful global brands'.

Larger economies of the world have a wider range of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shaw and Williams 1994) and their economic innovations have provided opportunities in the hospitality and tourism sector for entrepreneurs to succeed. However, the same thing cannot be said of most developing countries of Africa. Although, entrepreneurship could play a vital role for tourism and hospitality development especially in the rural and ethnic communities within the small economies of Africa, but inherent challenges due to lack of supports from the government stand to constraint this opportunity.

Tourism and hospitality industry

Since ancient times people have travelled, with different motivations, but the idea of outing or exploration appeared much later. The content of the term tourism is a complex one, in literature it is considered a global phenomenon, with a multifunctional approach, a human experience, a geographic phenomenon, a business, an industrial type complex, comprising a set of activities, services and industries: transport, accommodation, catering and restaurant trade, leisure and hospitality services that are offered to meet the needs of tourists. "Nowadays, tourism manifests as a distinct field of activity with an increasingly more active presence in economic and social life, with one of the fastest evolutions. Generator of profound transformations in social dynamics, tourism was also stated to be a factor of progress and civilization, as a promoter of international relations and, more recently, the argument of globalization and sustainable development" (Page and Connell 2006; Ciochina I., Iordache, C.M., and Sirbu, A. 2016).

The concept of hospitality underpins much of what the tourist experience as a traveller, namely the consumption of food, drinks and accommodation away from the home environment. As Lashley (2000) observed, it is this context where such activities create a range of relationships, some of which occur in commercial, social and private settings. Historical studies of the hospitality sector indicate that commercial hospitality has its roots in supplying to travellers through the market, the basic human needs of foods, drink, shelter and rest (Walton 2000). From the early ale houses of medieval times, to inns and the emerging public houses, such establishment met travellers' needs. Yet it was the Victorian era that saw the rise of the hotel, restaurant and large scale caterer in the form of public dining rooms in London from the 1820s.

Medlik and Ingram (2000) pointed out that; hospitality sector play important role in most countries in providing facilities for the transaction of business, for meeting and conferences, and for recreation and entertainment. The positive effects of the hospitality and tourism sector are, for example, the enhancement of well-being and the growth of local economies. Local firms influenced by the sector are not only the direct ones, but also the induced economies which obtain new customers, although indirectly. Other effects concern the environment and the socio-cultural context which may be affected by the arrival of new cultures and lifestyles,

but also an overcrowding in the local area, leading to pollution and disruption of the territory and the local natural environment (Pedrana, 2013). In the case of tourism, territories which have tourism potential compete on the attraction of new tourists towards such areas, although the strategies may be different, i.e. from promotion to new attractions.

The hospitality industry targets: food, recreation, accommodation for those who are away from home for longer or shorter periods of time, including hotels, restaurants and commercial activities such as: guest houses, snack bars and fast-food establishments (Ciocchina I., Iordache, C.M., and Sirbu, A. 2016).

STUDY AREA

This research therefore focused on Lokoja, the capital city of Kogi State and how it develops the entrepreneurship capacity within its tourism and hospitality sector. The town Lokoja is an ancient town, located west bank of River Niger. It is a confluence town where the two biggest Rivers in West Africa (Niger and Benue Rivers) meet. The union Jack was hoisted in Lokoja in the year 1900 after the declaration of the Northern Nigeria Protectorate by the British Government, making the city the first capital of the British Colony.

Since the creation of Kogi State in 1991, Lokoja has experienced expansion in growth of its various sectors including the Hospitality industry (Mejabi, 2021). Since hospitality entrepreneurship is a pivotal factor in the development and growth of many economies. Hence, it becomes imperative to understand the dynamic nature and challenges confronting the entrepreneurs in her hospitality sector.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was selected, being more suitable for research study where the variables are not known, and where the main goal is to explore (Creswell, 2012). The instrument of data collection adopted was in-depth interviews, which according to Okpoko and Ezeh (2005) 'entail the collection of semi-structured or unstructured data through interviewer-interviewee verbal interaction or conversation'.

Therefore, 45 hospitality entrepreneurs were purposively selected for an in-depth interview each. Among this list are 30 owners/managers of small and medium size hotels and lodging facilities in Lokoja and 15 owners/ managers of restaurants and eateries in the city. Each interview was conducted face-to-face, lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analysed using content analysis. This is a method that enables researchers to include a large amount of textual data and systematically identify key properties of that data, such as the most-used key words (Stemler, 2001). According to Stemler (2001), content analysis assumes that the words that are mentioned most often are the words that reflect the great concerns.

The interview transcripts were sorted and coded according to thematic analysis. This thematic idea was used to identify key themes in the data. The emerging themes from the study includes; access to finance, infrastructure, state of the economy, government policies, entrepreneurial skills, and security. These themes were then supported with selection of vivid extracts from the transcripts which were synthesised in descriptive summary as the findings of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

From the various in-depth interviews, the following information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents were recorded.

Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Demographic Characteristics	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	32	71.1
	Female	13	28.9
	Total	385	100
Age	25-35 years old	6	13.3
	36-45 years old	8	17.8
	46-55 years old	16	35.6
	56 above	15	33.3
	Total	45	100
Business	Medium size hotel	11	24.4
	Motel	6	13.3
	Night Clubs	14	31.1
	Restaurant	14	31.1
	Total	45	100
Year in Business	<5 years	9	20
	5-10 years	17	37.8
	11-15 years	11	24.4
	15years >	8	17.8
	Total	45	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As indicated in Table 1, there were more male participants (71.1%) than females (28.9%) in the sampled entrepreneurs in Lokoja. Findings shows that ownership of hospitality outfits in the city are mostly men, with the exception of restaurants and eatery segment of the industry where females are more dominants. In considering the age bracket of the participants, the above table indicated that majority of the participants (68.9%) are above 45 years old. This shows that the youths are still not fully involved in the ownership of hospitality enterprises in the city. The socio-economic factor in Nigeria has invariably constrained the teeming youths from being a job providers but job seekers. Result as indicated in above table shows that restaurants (31.1%), Night Clubs (31.1%), Motel (13.3%) and Hotel (24.4%) are the most attractive business within the hospitality industry in Lokoja. Results also show that 57.8% of the respondents started their business within the last 10 years.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As the need and call for entrepreneurship in Nigerian economy increases by the days, without corresponding development due to various constraining factors; the study sought to know the major challenges facing the entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry in Lokoja. The in-depth interview findings was based on the key thematic points identified as challenges by the 45 owners/managers of hospitality enterprises in our study area. The emerging themes from the research findings are as follows:

Lack of access to finance: The participants identified lack of capital as a major challenge in their business operation. It is a common knowledge that generating the idea for a business venture is not the most decisive factor in the establishment of a new business. Hence, the reason Page and Connell, (2006) postulated that ‘finding the funding is the crucial hurdle which only the minority of prospective new entrepreneurs can overcome. Tailor, Simpson and Howie (1998) also pointed out the importance of finance in tourism and hospitality operation in both the establishment of a venture as well as the subsequent resourcing and growth of the business. It is on this note that majority of the participants in the study identified lack of capital (either start-up capital or capital for business expansion) as a major challenge stalling the development of entrepreneurship in Lokoja. Most of the participants agreed that they possessed wonderful

business ideas that could start and grow their businesses. However, they lack the needed capital to push their ideas into realities. The study observed that most of the banks and other financial institutions were not ready to give loans to these entrepreneurs. A participant in the study who left a paid job about 5 years ago to establish her restaurant business stated:

I left my paid job at an insurance firm to establish this restaurant. I believe in self-employment hence, the reason I resigned to start my own business. The little saving I have was the start-up capital for this business. I have tried severally to secure loans from banks to expand this business to no avail. Hence the reason I'm still at this level".

The study reveals that most of the participants try to turn to banks to secure loans for either start-up capital or for expansion of their business without success. The reason for this could be that the banks feel it is a huge risk lending money to investor in hospitality business as they are not sure if the entrepreneur will be able to pay back the loan. This resonates further with the assertion of Page and Connell (2006) in their text that, 'banks will prefer to invest in small business sector that they know well, for example farming, because they have a long history of financing this sector and know the risks and reward available'. Study also shows that in situation where the bank is ready to lend money to the investor, the demand for huge collateral and high-interest rate on the loan most often discouraged the entrepreneur.

Poor state of Infrastructure in Lokoja: The Participants in the study revealed that lack of good infrastructural facilities is another major challenge affecting entrepreneurial activities. The study shows that the issue of unstable power supply has forced many of the small size hotels and night clubs to close down. Tourism and Hospitality businesses depend heavily on constant electricity supply to thrive. Findings reveal that most of the hospitality enterprises in the city have to rely on generating set to supply electricity with huge financial cost. A small hotel operator in the study stated:

"Erratic power is our major bane in this business in Lokoja. More than 70% of my earning from this business is spent on the purchase of fuel to power my generator, because no guest will lodge in a hotel that has no electricity. So we keep struggling to remain in this business. Government should assist us".

The study also shows that lack of good roads network in the city of Lokoja is another major challenge confronting the entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry in Lokoja. The poor state of the intra road network in the city makes the cost of running a hospitality business high, thereby creating a situation where the entrepreneurs in the industry are struggling to survive in their business ventures. This scenario confirmed the assertion of Bhatia (2001) that 'if hospitality and tourism development programme is to succeed, it is necessary to provide life support through a number of infrastructural facilities'. Hence, Successful tourism and hospitality enterprise requires reliable and adequate infrastructure. Roads leading to some of the hospitality establishments in this study are in deplorable conditions leading to low patronage. Therefore, most of the small enterprises find it difficult to break even due to this infrastructural deficiency in the city.

Unstable state of Kogi State economy: The state of the economy of Lokoja is also a major challenge for entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry of the city. The state of the economy of any region or state has significant impact on the level of entrepreneurial development of that region. Study reveals that the state of the Kogi state economy and that of Lokoja in particular is a major impediment to sustainable Entrepreneurship in Lokoja. Lokoja is majorly a civil servants' city, in view of this, the economic status of the civil servants in the state have overbearing influence on the tourism and hospitality enterprises in the city. Page and Connell (2006) opined that 'the availability of the necessary finance is perhaps the most obvious

variable influencing tourism demand'. Therefore, the lack of discretionary income due to non-payment or delayed payment of salary by the state government makes it impossible for the civil servant to engage in tourism/leisure related activities. Findings show that most hotels in Lokoja are empty owing to low patronage, while other recreational centres and social joints complained of low turnout. The only periods some of the hospitality outfits experienced little improvement in patronage are weekends and festive sessions; while most of the guests at that period are from Abuja or other neighbouring cities who come for weekend social events. A participant who manages a night club in the city asserted that:

“The economy downturn in Lokoja occasioned by the non-payment of civil servants’ salaries has led to the collapsed of many hospitality businesses in Lokoja”. He further stated that most hotels make little sales during weekends due to influx of visitors from Abuja and other neighbouring states that come to Lokoja for social events; an average Lokoja resident hardly has the wherewithal to patronise hospitality business these days”

Inconsistent/ unfriendly Government policies: According to Hall (2000) Policy reflects the strategic direction that a government deems appropriate to follow in its developmental strive for tourism. The study reveals that Kogi state government policy on entrepreneurial development leaves much to be desired. Presently, there is no clear cut policy that is aim at promoting and creating a conducive condition for the development of entrepreneurship in the state. Most of the participants in the study are in agreement that the government policy on levies and taxation are adversely affecting the Small and Medium-Size Hotels (SMSH) in Lokoja. The tax burden is heavy on the entrepreneurs, as all forms of levies and taxes are imposed on the businesses that are still gasping for breath of survival.

Poor entrepreneurial skills and inadequate planning: Page and Connell (2006) argued that much of the success of entrepreneurship is dependent upon the individual entrepreneur”. Hence, the study discovered that most of the entrepreneurs lack the basic knowledge of entrepreneurship on how to nurture and manage their business. Also most of the investors did not carry out proper market research before they delved into the hospitality business. They lack business plan, and the requisite knowledge on how to manage and grow their business. Most of the respondents admitted that they have not undergone any training in hospitality management, or on tourism business management before the establishment of their business outfits. Hence, one of the major reasons for the business failure.

Lack of Entrepreneurial mind-set: Study reveals that a lot of the business owners and young entrepreneurs in the industry in Lokoja are out to make money quickly. They are more money/profit oriented and not entrepreneurial oriented. Findings from most of the participants reveal that they went into the business with the mind-set of making quick return on their investments. They lack the requisite patience to grow the hospitality business that has the potentials of becoming big. This has become a bane of sustainable entrepreneurship development in the hospitality industry in Lokoja.

State of Insecurity across the country: Findings reveal that the reduction in demand for hospitality services has been a marked pattern in recent years as the state of insecurity across the lengths and breaths of this country has degenerated to an abysmal level. Armed banditry, Kidnapping, and terrorism amongst others has made the country a much less safe place and a constraint on the freedom for people’s participation in tourism related activities. These has adversely affected the hospitality sector of the Nigeria economy with Lokoja the Kogi State capital not an exception. Nightlife has gradually been lost as people are afraid of stepping out of their residence at night. Most hospitality outfits in Lokoja are groaning due to lack of patronage. Restaurants are forced to close shop earlier than usual, while nightclubs are closing

down, all owing to insecurity challenges. This security concerns have had a profound effect on the volatility of tourism and hospitality demand in Lokoja.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study of challenges of entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry in Lokoja, Kogi State. The study found out that entrepreneurs within the hospitality sector in Lokoja, Kogi State of Nigeria face a lot of challenges in the highly-competitive world of business in Nigeria. While some of the challenges on the face value look minor, others are so daunting to the extent that they require prompt attention and intervention from the stakeholders so as to enhance the entrepreneurship development in the hospitality industry of Lokoja, in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this study, many steps are hereby recommended to be taken by the stakeholders to enhance the success of entrepreneurship in hospitality business in Lokoja.

The first that should be emphasised is provision of access to finance. To survive as an entrepreneur, access to capital in form of soft loans either for start-up or expansion of the business is inevitable. To this effect, banks and other financial institutions must relax the stringent conditions attached to loans facilities to SSMH investors in the city. Government Agencies such as Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Bank of Industry (BoI), should be alive to their responsibilities in offering credit facilities to investors in Lokoja.

The state of infrastructure in Lokoja is another major area to be addressed. Government must as a matter of urgency address the epileptic electricity supply in Lokoja and the entire Kogi State. Massive rehabilitation of the city's roads network should be embarked upon. Since this will significantly increase the number of visitors to the state which ultimately provides business opportunities for hospitality enterprises in the city.

On the challenge of inconsistent government policies on entrepreneurship development in the state. Collaboration is therefore important for sustainable entrepreneurial development in the sector. It will therefore be beneficial if the government can find ways to work with the stakeholders in the industry in policy formulation towards the development of SSMH in Lokoja. The government and the private sector operators must align their strategies towards a common purpose. Hence, a pro-active measure in which owners of hospitality business in the city and other entrepreneurs are fully engaged by the state government at the very stage of policy formulation and enactment of legal framework for the regulations of business operation is highly recommended.

On the poor entrepreneurial knowledge and mind-sets, government should work hand in hand with other Non-Governmental Organisations and professional bodies within the industry, particularly with regard to providing education in form of training and enlightenment on entrepreneurship. This will help to improve the knowledge-based of the people on how to run and grow a business. Thus improvement can be done in relation to the above identified challenges to enhance economic returns from the hospitality industry. This study suggests that thorough research on the issues identified should be undertaken by the state and federal governments. Assistance should be given to real entrepreneurs in the sector who have the potential to greatly influence economic prosperity in the city of Lokoja.

The state of insecurity in the country should be urgently addressed. Hence, measures to ensure a secure operating environment should be put in place, including the deployment of security personnel with a new innovation and strategies to curb the security concerns. From the individual entrepreneurs, residents and the public sector; intelligence needs to flow in all directions to address the nefarious activities of the criminals and terrorists.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The paper's contribution to the literature is three-fold. First, the study identifies the concept of entrepreneurship in the tourism and hospitality industry in general. Second, it investigates the pattern and challenges confronting hospitality entrepreneurs in Lokoja. Finally, from a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates that combining thematic with content analysis enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research.

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