

Covid-19 Pandemic and Entrepreneurial Marketing Response Strategies for Hospitality Industry Recovery in Nigeria

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the domestic, regional and international tourism industry with colossal losses in revenue in all the tourism value chains. One of the hardest hit is the hospitality sector. Decline in leisure culture, ban on individual and corporate travel occasioned by the lockdown have manifested in near-zero occupancy rate, decline in patronage, loss of revenue and facility shut-down in the hospitality sector. However, with the gradual easing of the lockdown in the domestic travel sector, the hospitality market is expected to regain its footing in the latter part of this year (2020) and next year (2021). The paper adopts the chaos theory and dynamic capability framework and argues that COVID-19 has become a metaphor for business threats and turbulence with serious negative effects as expressed by business pause and low patronage. Entrepreneurial marketing which is more preferable in times of uncertainties can help the sector mitigate the effect of the pandemic and survive by regaining customers' trust and confidence through standard safety/hygiene measures. The paper suggests technology-based innovation/creativity, exploration of new market opportunities, value creation through added packages, customer intensity through customer relationship management and improvement in customer service delivery in unconventional manners. The paper concludes that the 'new normal' created by the COVID-19, though not desirable, is however, a test for hospitality managers to rethink new ways of doing business as their survival depends on their response strategies.

Key words: COVID-19 effects, Entrepreneurial marketing response strategies, recovery/survival, hospitality sector

1. Introduction

The Corona virus disease, commonly referred to as COVID-19, which broke out in Wuhan, China in the later part of last year (2019) has become a pandemic of unpredictable and unimaginable proportion with its spread of infection across 200 countries worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). Its spread to all the continents of the world has been largely accentuated by international travel and tourism, which is arguably, the largest and fastest growing industry in the world (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). Paradoxically, the travel industry became the first casualty of the pandemic with many of its value chains and other sectors now operating on almost 'ground zero' due to travel restrictions, business and community lockdown, physical distancing and other containing measures adopted by governments and local authorities. Consequently, economic recession is looming on the horizon. The economic disruption in the tourism and hospitality industry occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and attendant loss in revenue and layoff is considered to be three times greater than those of the great depression of 1929, Asian financial crisis in 1998, SARS in 2003, and global financial crisis in 2008 combined. The UNWTO Report (2020) estimates USD 1.2 trillion loss in revenue in the past six months with 120 million direct tourism job at risk.

From the marketing standpoint, this contradiction is characterized by reduction in consumer and industrial purchase behaviour, cut in marketing budget and declining sales and profit in many business organizations. Quelch and Jocz (2009) have identified patterns in consumers' behavior and firms' strategies in a downturn that either propel or undermine performance. They opine that manager need to understand the evolving consumption patterns and fine-tune their strategies accordingly. In the present scenario, COVID-19 has triggered reduction in disposable income which in turn reduces discretionary income leading ultimately to poor recreational culture and leisure travel. Consequently, customers generally set stricter priorities and reduce their spending. Almost all customers reevaluate their consumption priorities, maintaining necessities and reducing or eliminating treats, and expendables due to a drop in their disposable income. At firm level, as sales declines, businesses typically cut costs, reduce prices, and postpone new investments.

However, with the gradual easing of the lockdown and lifting of domestic travel restrictions, the hospitality sector, the component the tourism industry which provides need-satisfying accommodation products, foods, beverages, entertainment, recreations and auxiliary services to visitors, travelers and tourists at a profit (Miello, 2014) are expected to pick up. Although restart is underway, but customer confidence and purchasing power is low. And since most consumers consider tourism products as non-essentials during a downturn (Malhotra & Venkatesh, 2009), effective marketing of tourism services such as accommodation, restaurant dining, travel, lodging, entertainment and recreational offers can be a challenging task for hotel managers in the post-covid-19 era. This is because the 'new normal' presupposes changes in the consumer psychology and remodeling of business both of which the hospitality manager must understand in order to successfully operate in the dynamic business environment characterized by threats and also opportunities. Again, given the uncertainty, hostility, economic malaise and challenging times in which tourism businesses will operate in the post-COVID-19 economy in many countries, it stands to reason that hospitality business recovery and survival may also be attained through entrepreneurial approach to marketing (Ionita, 2012; Kraus et al (2011).

In mitigating the effect of COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector, many have suggested financial bailout, working capital management, operational efficiency and cost reduction response strategies (Uknomoh,2020). However, we argue that since the effect of COVID-19 pandemic is deeper and far-reaching in scope, a combination of entrepreneurial and marketing (entrepreneurial marketing) approach can also help the hospitality sector to respond to customers' needs, concerns and expectations in the new normal. This paper therefore examines the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the hospitality sector and proposes entrepreneurial marketing response strategies for recovery and survival.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

The Chaos Theory is considered appropriate to the study. Chaos Theory is a part of Mathematics which has been borrowed into Social Science studies. The theory states that a very small change may make the system behave completely differently. That is to say those very small changes in the starting position of a chaotic system make a big difference. Simply put, the theory states that seemingly simple events could produce complex and confounding behavior. In other words, small effects lead to big changes in the whole system. The theory deals with the changing relationship between order and disorder in the behavior of natural or social systems, often referred to as "butterfly effects" (Speakman and Sharpley, 2012)..

Chaos theory was propounded by Henri Poincare, but popularized by Edmund Lorenz in 1961. The theory is related to the hospitality sector when viewed within the context of the symbiotic relationship between business and the complex environment in which it operates. For example, the recessionary threat reduces discretionary spending which in turn affects leisure and corporate travels. Consequently, reduction in travel reduces number of hotel guests, occupancy rate and overall turnover which ultimately leads to poor hotel performance. In the same vein, recessionary threats affect the transportation sector and travel agencies which are all related to the tourism industry. Accordingly, unprofitable organizational performance leads to retrenchment and facility shutdown with some attendant negative consequences for suppliers, the economy and the society at large. Thus, there is a clear and close connection between the tourism system and the economy that makes it complex. As such, chaos theory principles need to be adopted to fully understand the tourism system and effectively manage the environment wherein tourism functions as a subset. Moreover, to understand the turbulent relationships/changes in the tourism system during crises, chaos theory puts forward a number of theoretical concepts: 'butterfly effect', 'lock-in-effect', 'edge of chaos', 'bifurcation', 'self-organisation' and 'strange attractors' (Speakman and Sharpley, 2012). In tourism, due to the 'butterfly effect', single events may bring chain changes to destinations which could be positive or negative. The implication is that in times of economic disruption, there are firms or individuals who manifest unusual resilience to survive. Mmom (2018) seems to allude to the idea of relevance of chaos theory in explaining business threats and survival behavior in challenging times by succinctly referring to it as 'order in disorder, rethinking inside the box'.

Another theoretical foundation for this study is the dynamic capability theory which states that firms can manage and reconfigure their existing pool of resources through their innovative capabilities to deal with the turbulent environment in which they are embedded. It was propounded by Teece, Pisano and Schuen

(1997) in response to the observation of certain inadequacies in resource-based view (RBV). Thus, a business manager in challenging times can rethink a new business model and build solution blueprint around the problem to respond to the crisis, which according to a popular Chinese saying, means danger and also opportunities.

2.2 Conceptual Orientation

2.2.1 Effect of COVID-19 on the Hospitality Sector

COVID-19 pandemic led to the shutting down of world economy overnight (UNWTO, 2020) leading to a drop in global output hanging around 20% to 25% (Organization and Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020). Mastrogiacomo (2020) opined that observance of industry forecasts and trends is crucial to hospitality sector recovery strategy in the initial rebound in travel demand. In the same vein, a forecast from STR and Tourism Economics Report (2020) envisages a significant negative impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality to decline across demand, occupancy rate, , and revenue per available room in the hotel sector till the fourth quarter of 2020. Similarly, research from CBRE (2020) predicts that it will take approximately 6-10 months (June) for hotel service demand to begin to recover, and 12-16 months for revenue and profit to rise.. The predictions seem to suggest the need for the hospitality industry to adequately prepare for recovery. The hospitality industry, which includes businesses in food and beverage, lodging, entertainment and recreation which serve the needs of travellers, is unarguably, one of the worst-hit. Hospitality industry experts' forecast puts global travel industry loss in 2020 so far at USD2.1 Trillion dollars (Westfield, 2020). The other effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the hospitality as highlighted by Gursay and Chi (2020) include the following:

- i. Community lockdown resulting in temporary closure of hospitality businesses which greatly decreased patronage
- ii. Restrictions placed on travel and stay-at-home orders used by authorities led to sharp decline in hotel occupancies and revenue
- iii. Reduced capacity of dine-in restaurants with strict physical distancing guidelines
- iv. Gradual reduction of restrictions on domestic and international travels

A significant effect of the COVID-19 on the hospitality industry is expressed by World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2020), World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) and local authority guidelines on hospitality operations in a bid to restore customer trust and ensure employee and guests safety and health in the post-COVID-19 era. Vhories (2020) asserts that the entrenchment of Hotel HEALTH & SAFETY STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) POST COVID,2020 suggests that the industry will never be the same again as must come to terms with new normal. Operating in new dispensation involves compliance with standard in four areas:

Food & drink safety: Physical distancing in dining areas, Food can be delivered to guest accommodation, All plates, cutlery, glasses and other tableware have be sanitized.

Physical distancing: Contactless check-in/check-out, availability of cashless payment, adherence to Physical distancing rules, Mobile app for room service and screens or physical barriers placed between staff and guests in appropriate areas.

Cleanliness & disinfecting: Use of cleaning chemicals and technologies that are effective against Corona virus, Linens, towels and laundry washed in accordance with local authority guidelines, Guest accommodation is disinfected between stays, Guest accommodation sealed after cleaning, Property is cleaned by professional cleaning companies and Guests have the option to cancel any cleaning services for their accommodation during their stay.

Safety features: Staff follows all safety protocols as directed by local authorities, shared stationery such as printed menus, magazines, pens, and paper removed. Hand sanitizer in guest accommodation and key areas; Process in place to check health of guests and availability of First aid kit available (Glee Hotel Heath and Safety Standard, 2020).

Even with gradual easing of lockdown, hospitality organizations are expected to implement strategies in order to ensure employees and customers' health and safety. Funhkies (2020) envisages that the travel industry may still record a drop in travel demand in the short run due to travellers' apathy and low discretionary income which leads to declining demand's size for the tourist services, generally and hospitality services in particular, tourists choosing some hotels and eateries with a lower comfort grade, reducing the period of the holiday or the expenses during the holiday and tourists spending fewer money on souvenirs and shopping, food, hotel room and entertainment. Mahshala (2020) corroborates this view that gradual easing of lockdown may not bring about sharp improvement in turnout of guests, and revenue since many companies and individuals are still resorting to video conferencing instead of hosting events in hotels. Research by Gursoy et al (2020) suggests that customers did not feel comfortable to dine in sit-down restaurant, nor traveling to a distant destination or staying at a hotel. Guest health and safety concerns have been cited as one of the challenges the hospitality sector must confront and overcome in order to survive in the 'new normal' business arena. The implication is that an understanding of guests' behavioral intention in the post-COVID-19 era is very crucial in the formulation of marketing mitigation and recovery strategies for the hospitality sector.

2.2.2 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Marketing

Academics in the field of business management have recognized the nexus between entrepreneurship and marketing, hence the construct "entrepreneurial marketing" is an amalgam of two terms (entrepreneurship and marketing" (Ionita, 2012). As a construct, it has been defined in many ways by scholars. Frederick, Kuratko and Hodgetts, (2007; Stokes, 2000) conceptualize entrepreneurial marketing as a marketing activity undertaken in unconventional ways. In their contribution, Morris (2011) perceive entrepreneurial marketing as an opportunity- driven way of thinking and acting regarding marketing behaviors. Stokes (2006) opined that entrepreneurial is the "marketing of small firms growing through entrepreneurship". Research suggests that entrepreneurial firms manifest certain features such as possession of outstanding marketing competencies and capabilities related to understanding and responding to market trends, market positioning, and customer needs (Smart & Conant, 1994). For Stokes (2006), entrepreneurial marketing is a complex process as well as an orientation for how entrepreneurs behave in the marketplace. Although the heterogeneity in the conceptualization of entrepreneurial marketing construct by these scholars is not very glaring, there is, however, a common thread running through them, which is the combination of the features of entrepreneurship and marketing.

A synthesis of the above perspectives tends to support the position of Davis, Morris and Allen (2002) that the core marketing processes of creating and delivering value are augmented by entrepreneurial, innovative, and opportunity-driven approaches (Carson, and Covellio, 1996). Viewed from this standpoint, entrepreneurship provides a means for creating market value through innovation in new products, services, experiences, and strategies that satisfy customer needs. Firms that conduct this entrepreneurial process in a superior manner may be better positioned to achieve a sustained competitive advantage over time (Hills, Hultman and Miles, 2008).

Despite their similarity on focusing on customers' satisfaction, Morris (2011), however, highlights the difference between traditional marketing and entrepreneurial marketing. According to the authors, the former (traditional marketing) has historically been the transaction, and more recently, the relationship. The focal point of entrepreneurial marketing, however, is innovative value creation, on the assumption that value creation is a prerequisite for transactions and relationships. Thus, it is incumbent on the manager to discover untapped sources of customer value and to create unique combinations of resources to produce value. Following a somewhat similar train of thought, Ionita (2012) asserts that entrepreneurial thinking, which is nonlinear, creative and avoids predictions, contradicts the traditional marketing model. Thus a "divorce" appears between marketing theory which emphasizes managerial marketing behavior- and marketing practice in entrepreneurial firms. Marketing is said to be more relevant to large organizations, but the focus of entrepreneurial marketing is always on small firms (Shaw, 2004). However, Miello (2014) argues that it is not always the case, contending that a large firm can also be entrepreneurial, especially when it manifests entrepreneurial features, but he concurs with the consensus that most entrepreneurial firms do not practice conventional marketing.

2.3. Hospitality Entrepreneurial Marketing Responses to the Effects of COVID-19

According to a popular philosophical maxim, "you do not choose which challenges come to your desk, you decide how to respond to them" (Makhora, 2002). In the same vein, Darwin theory posits that it is not the strongest of the species that survive, or the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change (Militonovic, 2012)). This tends to suggest that hospitality organizations that will survive in the post COVID-19 economy are those that will respond proactively and innovatively to the contradictions of the new normal. The UNWTO Report (2020) and Gursoy et al. (2020) opine that guests and staff safety and hygiene measures as well as trust concerning service quality and guests retention will drive customer expectation as the sector rebounds. Consequently, some entrepreneurial marketing response strategies that can help the hospitality organizations address these concerns have been suggested. They are as follow:

2.3.1 Innovativeness

Asufo (2011) views innovativeness as a firm's openness to new ideas which reflects a basic willingness to diverge from the status quo. For Hills and Hultman (2011), innovativeness refers to "a willingness to support creativity and experimentation in introducing new products/services, and novelty, technological leadership and R&D in developing new processes. In the context of the COVID-19 economy, Jang and Wen (2020) identified three dimensions of hospitality industry innovation in the new normal, which include artificial intelligence and robotics, hygiene and cleanliness as well as health and health care. They

authors argue that the acquisition and deployment of safety and hygiene technological innovative products that guarantee guests and staff safety as the hospitality sector awaits the return of guests, will be the game changer and a source competitive advantage. Safety and hygiene innovation features deployed to increase health security and wellbeing will undoubtedly be based on technological solutions. Accordingly, technological innovation will drive the new tourist experience. Rokru (2020); Angela (2020), Zeng & Chang, (2020) affirmed that robotics, artificial intelligence and human-robot interaction have gained an increased presence to help manage the spread of Covid-19 in hospitals, airports, transportation system, recreation and science areas, hotels, restaurants and commuters, etc. For example, Contactless check-in/Check-out and keyless room entry (hotel software solution) technology allows hotel properties with the fuel contactless Mobile App and ASSA ABLOY locking systems to let guests access their assigned guests rooms using their mobile phones as a digital key. Touchless Digital Menu System is designed to promote hygiene and safe food handling methods for Restaurants and Hotels. In the same vein, Virtual TV remote control is designed to address an infection contaminants risks. Solay Mobile App provides social distancing technology for hotels, resort, swimming pools & beaches since it provides destinations and hotels with a free inventory management system to set up overnight guests with reserved seats placed 6 feet apart at pools and beaches. Antimicrobial technology branded micro-fresh for the disinfecting of highest touch points in guest rooms, filled foods, and bed and bath linen. Lew (2020) confirms that the antimicrobial technology has been proven to help protect against the spread of Corona Virus, killing more than 80% untreated textile and key up to 99.99% efficacy against harmful pathogens. Similarly, research by Heath (2020) indicates that the Westin Houston Medical Centre is the first hotel to employ germ-bursting robots that scan rooms with UV light to kill bacteria, fungi and viruses.

Previous research suggests that innovativeness is the most important component of a firm's response strategy in a dynamic and turbulent business environment because it is a source of competitive advantage for the firm (Hamel, 2010). This view is supported by a variety of studies that have found innovative firms to be higher performers in turbulent and challenging times (Shikuri and Chepkwony, 2013; Jaafar, 2012; Gulati, Nohria and Wohlgezogen, 2010).

Miles and Darroch (2006) corroborate this contention in a study in which the introduction of new services and goods (i.e. novelty) was a key driver of recovery and survival. Other researchers have found that those firms that are first to introduce new goods, processes and services (first movers) are able to gain and sustain competitive advantage. Accordingly, our position on the relevance of innovativeness as a veritable coping strategy in a downturn cannot be legitimately isolated from the empirical evidence of a strong and positive influence of innovativeness/creativity on marketing outcomes. Perhaps, it was this realization and understanding that informed Drucker's (1986) important charge to managers, "innovate or die".

2.3.2 Customer Intensity through Technology-driven Customer Relationship Management:

Quelch and Jocz (2009) assert that those loyal customers are the primary, enduring source of cash flow and organic growth during an economic disruption. Customer intensity focuses on innovative approaches to creating new relationships or using existing relationships to create new markets. Entrepreneurial marketing incorporates the need for creative approaches to customer acquisition, retention, and

development (Morris et al., 2002). Quelch and Jocz (2009) argue that firms that survive an economic downturn by emphasizing customer's satisfaction and retention will have a competitive advantage after the crisis is over. Prior research demonstrate that staying connected to past and upcoming customers through email and other social media platforms and implementation of loyalty programmes during the 2008-2009 global economic crisis was effective in driving bookings as travel demand increased and also helped prospective travellers and guests to make informed travel decisions (Iordache, 2013; Kimes, 2010; Quelch & Jocz, 2009). In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, Mastrogiamomo (2020) is of the view that customer relationship management campaigns that informs guests of the hotels' resumption for bookings with a special offer or exclusive experience, opportunity for cancellations to rebook, pre-stay and in-stay communication assurance of guests safety /hygiene and facilities upgrade can influence repeat visit or return intention. Research by Bhatnagar and Bhatnagar (2020) indicates that leveraging on social media/email/WhatsApp channels to engage with customers & partners intensely through engaging videos is crucial during lock-down and post lock-down opening. The research also shows that customers were spending more time digitally during lockdown. Thus, we submit that the utilization of the social media platforms to share information with customers concerning hotels' safety/hygiene measures to protect guests and employees as well as nurturing emotional connection with customers could be one of the ways of rebuilding customers' trust and regaining their confidence as the hospitality sector in Nigeria prepares for gradual rebound in the post COVID-19 business environment.

2.3.3 Opportunity-Driven

Opportunity-focused is an entrepreneurial marketing orientation that is characterized by a better awareness in filtering and evaluating opportunities in line with their current strategies and position in the marketplace (Nwaizugbo and Anukam, 2014). Opportunities are sources of sustainable profit potential, which tends to correlate with the rate of environmental changes. Thus, managers are actively involved in the search, discovery and adaptation to business opportunities. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs go extra mile to discover new opportunities or exploit the contradictions in the current situation and develop new market segments and exploit as a source of competitive advantage, which non entrepreneurial individuals cannot see. Bouch (2020) emphasizes the relevance of alertness to opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the entrenchment of physical distancing protocol by local health authorities, which does not permit sit-down dining in restaurants and hotel bars, a new market opportunity has been created in the sector for alternative means of delivering food to customers without their physical presence in restaurants and hotels.

Bouch (2020) observed that the deployment of virtual technological platforms (video conferencing) and conducting of webinars imply that business travel segment's rebound would be slow. With this development, non-essential business travel is expected to reduce for some time as organizations get used to virtual meetings, trainings and even events. The author emphasizes the relevance of monitoring this evolving trend proactively by hospitality organizations, especially hotels to plan accordingly for both offline as well as digital marketing.

A recent survey of North American leisure travelers conducted by Fuel Travel shows that 45% of travelers have cancelled a trip, and 11% of travelers have rescheduled a trip due to the Corona virus outbreak. However, 59% of travelers still plan to take a vacation in 2020. The study further revealed that

while many consumers have cancelled their trips, they have not lost their desire to travel. The implication is that hotels have an opportunity to capture future bookings by engaging guests that have cancelled. After COVID-19 subsides, people may also consider new destinations—opening the door for hotels to attract new audiences (Mastrogiacomo, 2020). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic also implies that the meetings, incentive tours, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) segment as organizational activities for the years 2020-2021 would largely be conducted locally, instead of hosting them abroad. Hotels can take advantage of these local business opportunities. Previous studies show a strong correlation between opportunity-driven entrepreneurial firms and positive marketing outcomes (Nwaizugbo and Anukam, 2014; Moreno and Casillas, 2008). Consequently, this paper concurs with Bouch's (2020) argument that effective communication of hospitality organizations' hygiene and physical distancing standards can bolster customer trust and creating local businesses opportunities for the operators in social events segment, including pre-wedding and wedding functions and anniversaries and other celebrations.

2.3.4 Value Creation

The focal point of entrepreneurial marketing is innovative value creation, on the assumption that value creation is a prerequisite for transactions and relationships. The task of the marketer is to discover untapped sources of customer value and to create unique combinations of resources to produce value (Morris et al., 2002). Value can be created from value destruction by changing our rethinking and releasing our creativity. Often these disruptive occurrences can be destroyers of value, but they are also an opportunity to create value (Mahajan, 2020). Thus, we argue that customers in the post COVID-19 business environment would be very discerning and not pressured by sugar-coated hospitality marketers into making purchase decisions that do add value to their wellbeing. This is based on cost rationalization theory and 'economic man' concept which posit that during a downturn, customers generally set stricter priorities and reduce their spending and would only spend on goods and services with perceived high value, with hospitality products being treated as non essentials by many consumers (Quelch and Jocz (2009). Again, we make bold to say that value addition packages will drive patronage in the hospitality industry in the 'new normal' era.

This argument is supported by research. Prior investigation shows that rate-obscuring tactic was a veritable value creation strategy often adopted by hospitality industry in times of economic distress (Vierse, 2013). In rate-obscuring tactics as applicable in the hospitality context, value packages are added to the room rate for the price of one (Edunayo, 2007). It may involve bundling tactic which allows a hotel manager to disguise rates in a way that does not show that the hotel is actually offering lower rates. Thus, a hotel can bundle room rate in with either additional night (for example stay two nights, get another one free) or with other services of the hotel. The logic behind bundling is to make it difficult for customer to determine the price of each components of service delivery (Ioadache, 2011). Unbundling is another tactic for implementing rate obscuring. Kimes (2010) observed that a hotel organization applying this approach bases its room rate on one room product (i.e, a clean room with a bed and bath) and charges additional amounts for any offer services that guests might use.

Heath (2020) predicts that goal-oriented hospitality organizations in the post COVID-19 business environment are those that will emphasize value creation in their marketing strategy in the face of

spending slump by creating value-added packages, providing cancellation flexibility and even considering such offers as “Book Now Stay Later” vouchers valid for say 6 months to encourage impulse purchases. The link between value creation and firm performance has been substantiated empirically. Previous researches show that value creation as expressed in many packages have been identified to positively correlate with brand loyalty after crisis was over (Hrubalova, 2015; Gulati et al, 2010; Kimes, 2010) which also holds prospect for hospitality organizations in the post COVID-19 era in Nigeria.

2.4 Hospitality Industry Recovery

Business recovery is viewed by Westfield (2020) as a process of a rescuing a business and returning it to profitability. Business recovery has also been conceptualized as the phase of business cycle following a recession during which a firm or company regains and exceeds peak output levels prior to the downturn the author explained that it is a state of a business being in danger and needing a rescue. Therefore, hospitality industry recovery describes the strategies put place management to preserve and prevent its permanent shutdown or collapse (Wieseman,2014) avers that the key objective off a firm’s recovery strategies is quickly identify and address the sources of its problems that may lead to its collapse. In this regard, it is logical to think that management challenge is not only to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but to also consider how their hospitality organizations will recover and thrive after the crisis is over.

Mastrogiacommo (2020) suggests a three-phase approach to hospitality recovery in the COVID-19 pandemic and their corresponding customer relationship management strategies: travel -on pause stage, initial rise in travel demand stage and full travel demand stage. The travel –on pause stage is characterized by zero travel and many are closed due to community lockdown. The author suggests effective contacts with past and future guests through social, email, and editorial content that entertains and adds value to maintain a strong brand relationship. However, this may not be possible small hotels in many developing countries where guests’ data filing is not in place. During the initial rise in travel demand stage when people are beginning to reconsider rebooking and planning vacations, marketing efforts are directed at hotel brand awareness and brand recall and motivating new guests into the booking and making new reservations. Mastrogiacommo (2020) opines that at this stage, a flexible cancellation policy and sensitive messaging relevant to the situation cannot be emphasized as it very critical to regaining customers trust. The full travel demand stage is characterized by continuous marketing efforts shifting focus to lower-funnel intent as well as targeting the right market segment with the right communication strategy about the organizations’ products and services as well as their employees/guests safety and hygiene measures. An important research conducted by Qaten, Quesne, Segal, & Deloitte (2015) on adaptation to uncertainty in the global hotel industry show a correlation between adaptation strategies and survival. Therefore, Jang and Wen, (2020) emphasize careful planning and implementation of COVID-19 recovery strategies because their predictive influence on the post COVID-19 performance of hospitality organizations.

3. Conclusion and Implications

Guests and employee's safety/hygiene standard will drive hospitality marketing in the post COVID-19 business environment due to health concerns. Any hospitality organization that does not operate in compliance with WHO and hospitality COVID-19 protocols would suffer competitive disadvantage. Therefore, meeting customers' safety/hygiene expectations and profitability objectives without compromising service quality will be a challenging balancing task for hospitality managers in the new normal, especially in SMEs in the sector. Empirical review suggests that the acquisition and deployment of safety and hygiene technology- based innovative products, regaining of customer trust and confidence through customer relationship as well as digital marketing strategies will be the game changer and source competitive advantage as the hospitality sector rebounds. Achievement of safe, healthy and clean hospitality environment in the post COVID-19 era will also require cash injection (financial palliatives) for the operators, strict enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, health/hygiene certification by local health and professional authorities, and staff training on hospitality industry COVID-19 operating standard. The paper concludes that the 'new normal' created by the COVID-19, though not desirable, is however, a test for hospitality managers to rethink new ways of doing business as their recovery and survival in the new normal, among other things, depends on their entrepreneurial marketing response strategies.

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