

Corona Virus and its Impact on Hospitality Industry in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The study explored Corona Virus and Tourism in Nigeria, particularly with reference to hotel businesses, using selected hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which Corona Virus has affected hotel businesses in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted the contingency theory. The survey method of research was adopted with a sample size of 100 drawn from a population of 120. The indebt interview and questionnaire were adopted in the selection of respondents. Data that addressed the research questions were analyzed using descriptive method. The findings of the study showed that Corona Virus is real in Nigeria. That Corona Virus has caused so many people working in the hotel industries to lose their jobs. iii. The study also find out that if Corona Virus continues there is going to be increase in crime rate in the society since the retrenched workers in the Tourism industries especially the hotel may not have other sources of livelihood, etc. Based on these findings the study made the following recommendations ii. There is the need for tourism businesses in Nigeria especially the hotel industries to adopt new methods of running the business. And the need for Nigerian government to allow the tourism industries to operate with certain measures to curtail the spread of Corona Virus

Keywords: Corona, Virus, COVID-19, Pandemic, Tourism, Hotel, Social Distancing, Lockdown.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corona Virus is a global social problem. It originated from China in 2019. This pandemic as it is called is also referred to as COVID-19, the 19 signifies the year it started. Although this pandemic started in China, it has

travelled far and wide including Nigeria. COVID-19 is said to be caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2, 2020). Corona Virus has raked the world's population and economy. It has affected employment in almost all countries of the world even the most industrialized nations are faced with serious unemployment because of the pandemic. Organizations all over the world are forced to shut down production and other activities. For that reason, organizations are equally forced to retrench their workers living them to be unemployed.

Due to the presence and existence of Corona Virus, most industries have become very weak. One of the most affected is hotel and recreation arm of the tourism industry. Globally, every country is making serious efforts to curb the spread of the virus by taking certain measures such as, social distancing, wearing of nose mask, limiting travel, quarantining citizens suspected to be infected, enforcing stay at home, work from home, cancelling large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts, schools, marriages, burials, churches, and closure of market places etc. Corona Virus is fast travelling to almost every part of the world; it has the tendency to eliminate the population and economy of any country that fails to take proactive measures to curtail its impact. Once Corona Virus enters into any country, it has the tendency to create devastating social, psychological, economic and political problems to that nation (Eaton, 2020).

The pandemic has put the world in a strange and unrecognizable territory. Most large cities in the world are deserted as people stay indoors, either by choice or by government order. Across the world, shops, theatres,

restaurants and bars are closed down. On daily basis, people are losing their jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Several nations whose incomes are greatly dependent on tourism, such as hotel businesses and beaches are facing serious crisis. Hotels and beaches are deserted because people are no longer travelling as it ought to be (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, 2020).

There is rising cost of production, transportation, decline in investment and employment, the world largest economy is facing serious challenges because of the Corona Virus pandemic, as the effects of its conditions boomerangs, the whole world is affected (Panira, 2020).

The world economy is confronted with serious crisis. Due to the fact that the world is a global village, what happens to one part of the world automatically affects all other parts and Nigeria is not exempted. Nigerian economy has been trapped by the Corona Virus pandemic with certain sectors like the tourism industries mostly affected. Most employees in the hotel business have lost their jobs because of COVID-19. If this problem continues, no doubt most organizations in Nigeria including the hotel sectors will closed down because of low patronage.

More worrisome is the fact that media reportage of the pandemic and the conspiracy theories surrounding the pandemic tend to affect efforts been made to address the pandemic. While deliberate efforts are on to curb the spread and sustain the global economy, many people whose sources of livelihood depend on transportation and hotel segments are now constrained. Government order on closure or restriction on the number of guests in a hotel and recreation facilities have led to decline in the viability and sustainability of the travel and hospitality industry. This study therefore assessed the impact of the pandemic on the hospitality industry in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The impact of Corona Virus in the hospitality industries in the world especially hospitality businesses in Nigeria and in particular Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria with particular reference to selected hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria is as serious as the pandemic itself. The pandemic called COVID-19 has caused serious problems in the hotel industries in Nigeria and in Port Harcourt especially because Port Harcourt is one of the commercial cities in the Nigeria and

with vast number of hotels situated in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Due to Corona Virus many hotel businesses in Port Harcourt closed down especially when the pandemic was at it peak. The closed down of the hotels in Port Harcourt was majorly as a result of several policies by the government as preventive measures to stop the spread of the disease to members of the society. Some of these policies range from sit at home, no night activities and as we all know, most people that patronize the hotels usually do this at night hours and also most hotels have other activities usually done in the night hours.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic did not only affect the owners of the various hotels studied. It also affected the workers of these hotels because since people were instructed to sit at home workers were also not allowed to go work and as a result most of the hotels could not pay salaries to staff since there was no work within the period of sit at home. The pandemic caused severe unemployment and hardship to people especially workers of hotel industries in Nigeria especially in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Apart from workers being affected, owners of the hotels were also seriously affected since there was no patronage from customers with that period. Investigation and interviews that were carried out shows that most of the buildings some of the hotels were operating on were on lease which the hotels owners renew on yearly basis. So with the closed down of the sector the lease did not stopped running and the owners of the hotels also were expected to pay their rent not minding whether or not if the businesses were operational or not. All these contribute to the challenges the hotel businesses faced at the peak of the pandemic. Apart from the annual rents as a result of the leasing terms of the hotels with the owners of the lands where the hotels are situated, other bills were also running while the COVID-19 was at its peak. Bills like electricity, maintenances of the facilities, water, City council, and several other over head costs were still running despite the fact that COVID-19 was on. The implication of this was massive. Most hotels could not be able to fund some of the bills. Based on that, some landlords who did not have the patience to endure had to ask the owners of the hotels to pack out of their premises.

This unexpected quit notice by the so called landlords also posed serious challenges to the owners of the hotels and the management of the business as a whole. Similarly, due to the long range of closure of these hotels, and non-use of the hotel facilities, most of the facilities and

equipments in the hotels were dilapidated. The dilapidation of these facilities also led to the negative impacts that the hotel businesses faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The closure of hotels in Port Harcourt as a result of the COVID-19 also affected several events and social gatherings that usually take place in these hotels. Most of the hotels in Port Harcourt also serve as events centres for occasions such as wedding reception, venue for conferences especially for most large companies in Port Harcourt and outside Port Harcourt, recreational centres etc. All these events when organised in these hotels, the organizers usually pay huge amount of money for using the hotels as venues for their occasions. But due the COVID-19 pandemic, most of these hotels could not accommodate such activities and as a result could not get the opportunity of getting the income that could have come from such events.

Apart from the direct negative impact of COVID-19 on the hotels in Port Harcourt, workers of these hotels also were affected because some of the hotels had to retrench most of their workers since the hotels were not in operation within the period COVID-19 was at its peak. This in turn led to serious devastating effect of the staff of the hotels. Most of the staff of these hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria who lost their jobs could not pay bills such as house rent and even provide for their immediate family. Most of them had to withdraw their children from school. In some cases, where the tenant is unable to pay rent after some months, the owner of the said property might feign ignorant of his or her financial situation and eject him/her from the house. It has been observed particularly in most of the big cities in Nigeria that belongings of tenants are thrown away from their rented apartments when they could not pay rent after a giving time period (Ihedioha, 2014).

Again, because the closure of hotels and organizations in Nigeria came as a shock to both private and some government owned organizations, most of the perishable items that were supplied to the hotels which were not yet been used got perished. All these also added to the lost in capital by the management of the hotels.

Authors like Ayad (2008), Bhikha, & Dockrat (2015), Lateef and Chukwudi (2020) have done some work on Corona Virus and impact on Nigerian economy. These works looked at the issues of Corona Virus in general terms. None has actually looked at Corona Virus as it affects the tourism sectors especially the hotel businesses.

This leaves a gap in knowledge. For this, the present study has extended frontiers of knowledge on Corona Virus through its focus at explaining its impact on tourism sectors especially hotel industries in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

This question this study sought to answer is, what is the impact of the Corona Virus pandemic on the tourism industry especially the hotel businesses in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of Corona Virus on tourism business in Nigeria with reference to the hotel businesses.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Investigate the level of awareness of Corona Virus amongst hotel staff in selected hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Examine how Corona Virus has affected the standard of living of the people working in hotel sector in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. Investigate the effects of Corona Virus on employment in the Hotel sectors in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
4. To investigate the extent to which Corona Virus affected the management of the selected hotels studied in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The work is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of Corona Virus amongst hotel staff in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent has Corona Virus affected the standard of living of people working in Hotel sector in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What is the effect of Corona Virus on employment in the Hotel sector in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?
4. To what extent did Corona Virus affect the management of the selected hotels studied in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the contingency theory propounded by Fred Edward Fiedler. The theory emphasizes the need of both the leader's and the personality situation in which leader and owner of organization operates. It is an organizational theory which states that there is no one best way to organize an organization or corporation, to lead a

company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is dependent upon the internal and external situation. A contingent leader effectively applies this approach of leadership to the right situation. Contingent leaders are flexible in choosing and adapting to concise strategies to suit change in situation at a particular period in time in the running of the organization or society. According to the contingency theory, organizations are open systems that need careful management to satisfy and balance internal needs and to adapt to environmental circumstances, that there is not one best way of organizing. The situation at hand depends on the kind of task or environment one is dealing with.

Contingency theory is suitable for this work because the Corona Virus came unexpectedly so different countries and organizations need to take urgent measures to curtail the spread. The tourism industries like hotels, transport, recreational centres that need to remain in business must have to adopt quick ways of making sure that their businesses stay afloat.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The survey research design was adopted. This design was important because it availed the researcher the opportunity to gather information from the respondents.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was drawn from the employees in the selected Hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The total number of employees in these hotel amount to one hundred and twenty (120). The Hotels studied are: Hotel Presidential; Novotel Hotel, Le Meridian Hotel, Genesis Hotel, Golden Tulip Port Harcourt Hotel.

Sources of Data

The study made use of primary and secondary data. The primary data include questionnaire, In-depth Interview (IDI), while already written works from internet, library,

literatures (book), and related official documents etc were used as secondary data.

Study Area

This work was limited to five selected Hotel in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Scope of Study

This study concentrated on Corona Virus and Tourism in Nigerian, with emphasis on five selected Hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Sample Size

Data for the work was obtained from one hundred (100) employees of the selected hotels studied. Although the population of the hotels studied are one hundred and twenty staff (120) people, aged between twenty to forty five years. (20-45). The number of workers who granted audience to the researcher for interviews and questionnaire were 100. The sample size of this study was considered adequate because of obvious limitations particularly in terms of time, limited already written works, finance and insufficient field assistance to enable an extensive study of all the workers within the study population.

Procedure for Sample Selection

The major concern of our data generation was to obtain as wide a spectrum of participants from the research universe as possible. On this note, the only criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants must be employees of the selected hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Method of Data Analysis

Data gathered from the study was analyzed using descriptive methods. The descriptive methods include frequency distribution, percentage tables and charts. Since data for the work were mainly questionnaire, In-depth Interviews (IDI) transcribe where necessary with significant statements written verbatim in order to capture social reality.

Data Presentation and Analysis, Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents:

Age bracket of respondents

| VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | | |
| 20-25 years | 10 | 10 |
| 26-30 years | 15 | 15 |
| 31-35 years | 25 | 25 |
| 36-40 | 30 | 30 |
| 41-45 | 20 | 20 |

| | | |
|-------|-----|-----|
| Total | 100 | 100 |
|-------|-----|-----|

Source: Authors Field Work 2020

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Male | 85 | 85 |
| Female | 15 | 15 |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Source: Authors Field Work 2020

| Marital Status | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Single | 55 | 55 |
| Married | 20 | 20 |
| Divorced | 15 | 15 |
| Widow/Widower | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Source: Authors Field Work 2020

Data Presentation

Awareness of corona virus in Nigeria.

In our survey with discussants and interviewees, most of them were asked if they had knowledge about the phenomenon called Corona Virus. They expressed their various views as follow:

Corona virus is a major problem we are facing today.

The tourism sector in Nigeria especially the hotel business is really facing serious challenges. Costumers no longer come to patronize us like before. Since there is restriction of movement both locally and internationally, people that used to come to lodge in our hotels no longer come.

(FGD, Female, Age 25 Years).

Corona Virus is a dreaded evil that has befallen the world.

Since I was born I have never seen or experienced such situation before where the whole world is on a panic. Yes there have been previous crises in the world such as the global economic crisis, Ebola, etc but none has affected the tourism especially the hotel sector like this Corona Virus.

(FGD, Male, Age 28 Years).

Corona Virus has driven so many employees away from the Hotel industries. Even as I am speaking with you now, I wouldn't know what may befall me in the near future. I can go to work tomorrow and I can be served a letter to stop work

(FGD, Male, Age 30 Years).

My sister, it not easy for us working in hotels, Corona Virus is real, and is seriously

affecting all aspects of Nigerian economy especially the hotel sector. There is nobody, be it a child, young person or an old person that has not heard of this pandemic no matter where that person is.

(FGD, female, age 29 Years).

My dear, at first I thought Corona Virus was a scam, and a foreign matter, until it became obvious that it has entered Nigeria, now everybody has had a pinch of it. Corona Virus is gradually changing the world. People no longer live their normal life. Peoples' lives are being regulated by the government on how to live in the society. Corona Virus has introduced several concept to the society though Sociologically these concepts exists, but were not commonly used by people who are not Sociologists. But today everybody is making use of them. Such concepts like; social distancing, social clustering, seat at home, work from home, wear noise mask, etc.

(IDI, Male, Age 32 Years).

The above responses gave an insight to the fact that Corona Virus is not just a Western issue, but a global issue because almost every country in the world has felt and is still feeling its impact.

Effect of Corona Virus on standard of living of hotel workers

Madam to be frank with you, Corona Virus has really affected most of us working in hotels. To start with, salaries are not regular as it used to be. Before this Corona Virus, those of us working in this hotel were sure of our salaries no matter how little it may be. But right now it is no longer like that because everywhere is shaking.

(FGD, Female, Age 31 Years.)

Corona Virus or COVID 19 like they call it has affected the living standard of almost everyone working in this hotel. Most of us whose children and wards were in private schools may have to withdraw them from the private schools and put them into public schools once the schools reopened because of the shift in the living standard.

(FGD, Male, Age 34 Years.)

Effects of Corona Virus on employment in the hotel industries

In view of the effects of Corona Virus in the hotel sectors, respondents have these to say:

Dr. It may be difficult for you to believe me, more than ten of our staff are already laid off from this hotel. This has been reoccurring. No one is sure of him/her continuity in this hotel.

(FGD, Male, Age 29 Years.)

Irregular payment of salary is another problem we the workers in the hotel is facing now. I strongly believe that because of the fear of the unknown, that is why some of us do not mind even when we have not been paid for several months, we still report to work.

(FGD, Female, 38 Years).

Unemployment is a major effect of Corona Virus. Some of the staff that have been dropped find themselves back in the labour market, roaming the nooks and crannies of streets in Port Harcourt, searching for job.

(FGD, Female, 26 Years).

Ma, I do not want to think about this issue called Corona Virus because I personally collected money from a bank to buy landed property on interest, but with this Corona Virus the bank is seriously on my neck to pay off the loan I collected. So this is really a challenge to me. Meanwhile, am not sure of my continuity with the hotel.

(IDI, Female, 38 Years).

The above responses, indicate how salaries of workers are slashed down, irregular payment of salary, none payment of salary and unemployment as the major effect of Corona Virus in the tourism sector in Nigeria, especially the hotel business. With the responses got from respondents, Corona Virus is a reality and has caused massive

unemployment and untold hardship to majority of the workers in hotels.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Going by the data collected and the responses and analysis from respondents, it is obvious that the issue of Corona Virus is a reality. Majority of the workers in these hotels acknowledged that there is Corona Virus in Nigeria, and that it has caused wide range of setbacks to hotel businesses in Nigeria especially in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. From the responses gathered from the respondents who were willing to share their experiences with the researcher, it was clearly stated that Corona Virus has serious negative effects on the selected hotels studied in Port Harcourt. Some of the respondents narrated that due to the presence of Corona Virus, the hotel management has lost so much capitals. For example, the customers who usually come to patronize the hotels no longer come because of the policy that the government placed that all hotels should be shut down until further notice.

Similarly, some top management personnel in some of the hotel that were interviewed also stated that the closed down of the hotels has affected some of the equipment in the facility. One of these personnel clearly state that in their own hotels particularly since they were not working and the generator sets they have in their hotels were not in use, that the generators/plant they have are no longer working. This is as a result of abandonment for a long period of time.

The study also revealed that Corona Virus pandemic brought misunderstanding between most of the landlords who owns the properties and the hotel owners. Since some of the hotels are situated on rented lands or on lease, most of the owners of the rented properties are no longer comfortable for the long overdue money owned them by the hotel management.

On the other hand, the study also found out that if Corona Virus continues there is going to be increase in crime rate in Nigeria because most people will be without job and this will lead to the retrenchment of workers in the hotel. When these workers are retrenched, they will look for other sources to end a living. Some may end up involving themselves in all sorts of criminal vices. In addition, the work also revealed that because of Corona Virus, many of the workers are now forced to withdraw their children from the expensive schools and put them in affordable ones. Further findings revealed that Corona Virus is not limited

to the hotel industries alone, but that every sector of the economy is also affected.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the study concludes by highlighting certain observations drawn from the field as a result of interviews got from the respondents. The data gathered from the respondents indicate that Corona Virus is a reality. Most of the staff who works in these hotels attests that there is Corona Virus in Nigeria. This pandemic has caused serious setbacks to hotel businesses in Nigeria especially in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Going by the responses got from respondents interviewed to know and share their experiences with the researcher, most of them states in clear terms that Corona Virus has serious negative effects on the various hotels in Port Harcourt. Majority of those interviewed explained that due to the presence of Corona Virus, the hotel management has lost so much capital. Some went further to explain that because of Corona Virus, most of the customers who usually come to patronize the hotels no longer come because of the policy that the government placed that all hotels should be shut down until further notice.

Again, some management personnel of the hotels that were interviewed also stated that the closed down of the hotels affected some of the equipment in the facility. One of these management staff clearly stated that because the hotels were shut down, this affected the generator sets and other equipments they have in their hotels since they were not in use. He further explained that the generators/plant they are no longer working due to long period of abandonment. Also from the findings, it was revealed that Corona Virus brought misunderstanding between some landlords and the owners of the hotels. This is because some of the hotels are situated on rented lands and because activities were not going on, the hotel management could not renew or pay their rent as when it was due. If this pandemic called Corona Virus continues, crime rate will increase in Nigeria since most people who lost their jobs will be without jobs. Other findings revealed that Corona Virus is not limited to the hotel industries alone, that almost every sector of the economy is also affected.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is the need for tourism businesses in Nigeria especially the hotel industries to adopt new methods of running the business. Such method

could be in the form of reducing the number of people that come to patronize them at a time.

2. The Nigerian government should allow the tourism industries to operate with certain measures to curtail the spread of Corona Virus. Proper sanitation should be put in place in various hotels to avoid contamination of the virus.

3. Every hotel should have the instruments to check and test anybody entering and going out of the hotel environment.

4. There should be public health workers and social workers mounted in all major hotels to help in the screening and testing of people as they come into the hotels.

5. There is the need to have a better understanding of what can provide financial stability.

6. There should be the provision of appropriate social protection schemes.

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