SERVICE CULTURE AND PROFITABILITY IN NIGERIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRIES-A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA (A STUDY OF SELECTED HOSPITALITY ESTABLISHMENTS).

IFEGBO, L. I., PhD.

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OWERRI

&

OTENE ALICE

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

BENUE STATE POLYTECHNIC, UGBOKOLO

Abstract

Continuous offer of high quality service is extremely important in achieving consumer satisfaction which positively impacts on the profitability of hotels. In this current period of economic recession in Nigeria when the oil and gas sectors are contributing poorly to the nation's purse, government, in partnership with private sector, can upgrade the service offer of the hospitality Industry to increase itsr profitability and subsequently generate more revenues from the sector. This becomes essentially important particularly in this period of upsurge of hotel business. In this study of service culture and profitability in Nigerian Hospitality Industry, the researchers set out to investigate the service culture of Nigerian hotels, whether they truly deliver personalized services expected by customers in today's competitive arena, how these can contribute to profitability of the industry, and most importantly help to address the current state of economic recession in the country. Selected hotels in Nigeria are used for the study. These include: Concorde Hotels, Owerri; Ikeja Capital Hotel, Lagos; Benue Metropolitan Hotel and Resorts, Markurdi; Sheration Hotel, Abuja and Prince Hotel, Kano. The researchers adopt survey descriptive method of research and collected data using structured questionnaires. Data analysis is carried out using simple percentages and the hypotheses are tested using chi-square (x^2) statistical techniques. The results reveal that hotel operators in Nigeria are not sufficiently aware of the importance of effective service culture in their organizations. They also show that some of the required steps needed to nurture good service culture, such as staff training, employee empowerment, customer feedback mechanism and customer friendly policies are virtually lacking in some Nigerian hotel management. The results also reveal that positive service cultures capable of contributing significantly to the profitability of hotel business, as well as boosting the economy of the nation, were rarely adopted. It is concluded that service culture in most Nigerian hotels is substandard and this has negatively impinged on their level of profitability. Since it is obvious that the hospitality industry has high potential for revenue generation, the government could subsidize the private sector in funding the training and workshop participation of employees in the hospitality industry in order to make this realizable.

Keywords: Service Culture, Profitability, Hospitality, Establishments and Economic Sustainability.

Introduction

The advent of civilization, advancement in technology, improvement in trade and commerce, development in natural economy, coupled with efficient transportation network system, have greatly motivated Nigerians to travel from home in search of modern adventure. These have led to massive investment in hospitality business across the country for some decades now. Bello *et al.* (2008). noted that the initial fruit of the former president Olusegun Obasanjo led democratic

administration in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 recorded phenomenal progress almost in all sectors of the national economy, especially in the hospitality and tourism sector. This quest for travel seriously encouraged and strengthened the operators of hospitality firms to re-brand and focus their businesses towards the main objective of providing food, drink, accommodation and other ancillary services, thereby giving excellent support and services to all other performing sectors of the nation's economy. Bello (2006), posits that Hospitality industry is the last hope of all the travelers visiting places outside their homes, as the industry is expected to provide all the essential services needed by the guest, ensuring that high level of comfort, safety, and adequate relaxation are provided to enhance guests' total experience.

Apart from providing services and comfort to the guests, hospitality industries serve as veritable source of income for investors and if well enhanced, could be transformed as the main stay of the countrys' economy by generating massive revenue.

Since the industry has come to stay in Nigeria, it calls for continuous evaluation of its total package by ensuring that the delivery of customer quality service is adequately integrated. According to Okoli (2001), no good management of Hospitality organization can afford to compromise quality service because it is critical to the success of the business. People patronize the hospitality industry with much service expectations from the operators. Hence, inefficiency in service tends to frustrate guests, thereby attracting a complaint which certainly damages the goodwill and reputation of the organizations. When customers' needs are satisfied, especially beyond expectation, the organization gains and retain customer loyalty, patronage will rise and this is inextricably linked to the profitability of the hospitality firm. Therefore, quality service delivery is an essential ingredient for

successful hotel business and this can be enhanced by adopting service culture.

Service culture is a shared purpose where everyone is focused on creating value for others inside and outside the organization, (www.upyourservice.com). Service culture focuses on serving and satisfying the customer and if it must be created, will start with top management and flow down the levels -often reflected in the policy statement of organizations (www.ukessay.com).The problem is that operators of hospitality business focus more attention on activities that will generate profit on short-term bases such as quick fix and bargaining and lose sight of the importance of improved quality service.

Luthan (1992), pointed out that sustaining a feasible and viable service culture requires the commitment of management, supervisors and the front line employees. Some of the strategies to achieve customer winning service culture include indoctrination & training of staff, employees' empowerment, soliciting feed-back from customers, enacting customer friendly policies and creating awareness for service culture. These could be done by hosting ceremonies where excellent service providers are recognized and designing logos and symbols of customer service culture.

This study critically assessed how improvement on the service culture of Nigerian hotels can contribute sufficiently to profitability and most importantly boost the economy of the nation.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the consciousness of hospitality businesses in Nigeria towards the importance of service culture and its contributions to their profitability.
Other objectives are to:

- Examine the extent to which hospitality operators indoctrinate and train new

recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations,

- Ascertain whether the managements of hospitality establishments empower their employees;
- Investigate the extent to which hotel operators solicit feed-back from their customers;
- Examine the extent to which management policies of hospitality firms have helped them to satisfy their customers; and
- Determine the extent to which service culture contributes to profitability in hospitality firms and the economic sustainability of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for the study.

- ✓ To what extent have hospitality operators indoctrinated and trained their new recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations?
- ✓ To what extent do the managements of hospitality establishments empower their employees?
- ✓ How often do hotel operators solicit feed-back from their customers?
- ✓ How much have management policies of hospitality firms helped them to satisfy their customers?
- ✓ Have service cultural practices contributed reasonably to the profitability of hospitality firms and economic sustainability in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

Following the above stated research questions, the under listed hypotheses were formulated to guide the research:

HO_1: Hospitality operators always indoctrinate and train their new recruits on company traditions, and their history with customer relations.

HO_2: The extent to which management of hospitality establishments empower their staff is adequate.

HO_3: Hotel operators always solicit feedback from their customers.

HO_4: Management policies of hospitality firms have no significant effect on the satisfaction of customers if implemented.

HO_5: Service culture of hospitality firms has no significant effect on their profitability as well as the nation's economic sustainability.

Study Area

This study covered five (5) hotels, located in different cities of the country which are as follows: Prince Hotel in Kano city (Kano State); Sheraton Hotel, in Abuja (Capital Territory); Benue Metropolitan Hotel and Resort in Markurdi, Benue State; Concord Hotel in Owerri (Imo State); and Ikeji Capital Hotel in Lagos (Lagos state). This was deemed necessary in order to produce a result that is encompassing.

Review of Related Literature
The Hospitality Industry

The hospitality industry comprises of companies or organizations which provide food and/or drink and/or accommodation to people who are away from their home, (http://www.edb.gov.hk). According to Bello (2002), it is defined as the service oriented industry that provides food, drink, accommodation and other ancillary services to the public for profit making.

According to Laukova (2006), the hospitality industry is a significant player in the service sector and has formed a major catchword for almost all businesses and organizations. Service is an intangible experience or

performance that customer receives along with the tangible side of the purchased product and which is valued so much, especially in the hospitality industry. Laukova (2006) noted that good service is a requirement for getting and maintaining customers, without whom it is impossible to remain profitable. He further stressed that everyone in the company benefits from good service, not just the customers. According to him, there are external services for customers and internal services from one employee or department to another (Laukova, 2006). Raymond and Choi (2001) identified "staff service quality" as the most primary factor determining travelers overall satisfaction levels with their stay in Hong Kong hotel and the likelihood of a return visit to the same hotel in subsequent visits. Parasuraman *et al* (1985) have also suggested that face-to-face interactions, developing customer trust through long-term strategy, understanding customer habits to consume, pre-testing new procedures and equipment, teaching consumers regarding use of service innovation, would help in closing the standard gap between customer expectation and customer perception.

Organizational Service Culture

Laukova (2006) defined service culture as the way things are carried out in the company based on its values, behaviours, management styles and written and unwritten policies and laws. Also from his own perspective, Igbojekwe (2009) defined service culture as a set of assumptions or an ideology or a theme relating to service delivery within an organization. Put differently, Schein (1995) defined organizational culture as a system of common beliefs, values, norms and rules in an organization that conduct the behaviour

and emotions of its members. Furthermore, he explained that it is manifested in the way organizational culture has proven to be an enduring concept in predicting performance. Ambroz and Praprotnik (2008), concurred to this saying 'many studies show that organizational culture is one of the most important factors with an influential role in the determination of organizations' performance.' Ambroz and Praprotnik (2008), further stated that it is an important fact that the behaviour of the service provider during service delivery and consumption, directly influences customer satisfaction. From their own perspective, Kano *et al*. (1984), relates that effectiveness is closely related to the ability of the service provider to satisfy the customer. For instance, better quality service, excitement or a large variety of services will have a greater chance to satisfy a customer. Two of the keys to building a successful organization through a positive service culture are an organization's employee and its management philosophy (www.robertwlucas.com). To deliver effective customer service, organizations need to seriously commit to and invest in its frontline staff. This involves recruiting and hiring the best applicants, providing adequate training and tool to do the job, paying a competitive or above competitive rate, creating a work environment that helps motivate employees and empowering them to take up responsibilities and make decisions in matters relating to their jobs and customers. On the part of management, they should be knowledgeable of the organization and its products and services, the industry and surrounding competition (www.robertlucas.com). They should have good communication skill and be cultured enough to treat employees fairly and with respect. According to Ganjinia *et al*. (2013),

employee empowerment is one of the effective techniques for increasing productivity in employees and most especially responding positively to customer needs in a way that surpasses his expectations from the organization.

According to Dah & Damenya (2016), in order to satisfy customers and meet their expectations, hotels must be able to understand customers' needs and wants. Customer feedback channel is an effective and inexpensive means to understand the insight of customers' needs and wants (Heng *et al*, 2010). Meanwhile, Gohi (2013) considered it as an essential tool for measuring customer satisfaction, while Gilly and Hanson (1985), emphasized that effective execution of customer feedback results in customer satisfaction leading to customer retention.

Another determining factor for customer satisfaction was identified as company policies. The policies and strategies adopted in human resources affect the satisfaction of employees; and employee satisfaction has impact on customer satisfaction (XU & Geodegebure, 2005). Peggy (1995) suggested that one of the feasible strategies by which management of hospitality businesses can sustain their customer wining service culture is to establish policies that are customer friendly. For instance, companies should eliminate all routine and rigid policies and guidelines that will knock them out of business (or discourage patronagee).

The Hospitality Industry and its Economy
The hospitality industry has contributed immensely to the economies of countries and is therefore important to the development of many countries of the world. For instance, the UK hospitality industry contributed an estimated £ 57 billion to UK GDP in 2014, equating to 3.9 percent of the total UK GDP (Oxford Economics, 2015).

In some regions, income from this sector is a major source of foreign exchange, Fiji (Oyibo, 2013). Hospitality industry contributes to the economy, funding a large percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product, thereby helping to raise the national income. This is achieved by earning foreign currencies through the goods and services provided to foreign visitors, thus improving the balance of payment (Oyibo, 2013). Without doubts, the hospitality industry is the live wire of tourism at all levels. Furthermore, he affirmed that the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) confirms that between 70% and 75% of international tourists' expenditure goes to hospitality services on annual basis. The hospitality industry in Nigeria contributed ₦680.1 million to the Nigerian economy in 1980, ₦492.4 million in 1984, ₦477.9 million in 1990, ₦591.9 million in 2000, ₦950.0 million in 20014 and ₦2,390.0 million in 2006 (CBN 2006).

In terms of the Nigerian Hospitality Economy, the defining activities are:
- Hotels and related services (including camping grounds and other accommodation).
- Restaurants and related services, including pubs, take-away, food shops, licensed clubs and motorway services areas where hospitality services are rendered.
- Catering, including corporate hospitality/contract catering to both private clients (e.g. airlines) and public sector clients, and in-house catering across non-hospitality sectors, such as health and education.
- Event management, including conference and exhibition organizers.

Theoretical Framework
The two theories selected by the researcher to explain this study are Theory of Customer's Satisfaction (Assimilation Theory) and Theory

of Employee Empowerment (Spreitzers Theory of Psychological Empowerment.

Assimilation Theory

This is one of the theoretical approaches used to explain the process through which customers form satisfaction judgments. It is based on Festingers (1957) dissonance theory which posits that hotel consumers make some kind of cognitive comparism between expectations about the service and the perceived service performance (Peyton *et al.*,2003).This view of the consumer post-service evaluation was introduced into the satisfaction literature in the form of Assimilation theory (Anderson,1973).According to Anderson, consumers seek to avoid dissonance by adjusting perceptions about a given service to bring it more in line with expectations.

Spreitzers Theory of Psychological Empowerment

Spreitzer (1995) conducted the earliest studies on psychological empowerment. He developed and validated psychological empowerment theory to explain individual's orientation to his or her work role in the work place. According to Spreitzer, psychological empowerment is an internal stimulator that allows employees to feel or perceive that they have the ability to get things done. This perception results in work effectiveness and job satisfaction. Hence, he offers a more traditional definition of this concept, defining it as a motivational state that reflects an employee orientation towards work characteristics that rely on four determinants including Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact.

Relevance of the theories to the Study

The Assimilation theory provided the knowledge on the process through which consumers form satisfaction judgment - they make some kind of cognitive comparism between expectations about service and the perceived service performance. This privileged information can help hotel operators to device strategies with which they can ensure that perceived service performance significantly topples customer's expectation all the time. By so doing, positive service culture is invariably imbibed.

The Spreitzer's psychological empowerment theory revealed that individual orientation of the front office staff of hotels towards their work is determined by four factors including meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. These four factors serve as internal stimulators that allow the hotel front office staff to feel or perceive that they have the ability to get things done. Subsequently, this perception results in quality service delivery that translates to customer's satisfaction.

Research Methodology

The method adopted for this research was the survey descriptive method. The population of the study comprised five (5) luxury hotels in Nigeria. Probability random technique was used to select the staff who participated in providing the data for the study. In this method, every staff in the population had equal chance of being selected. A total of two hundred (200) structured questionnaires were distributed to the staff, out of which one hundred and eighty (180) were returned and this formed the basis of the analysis. Simple percentage was used in the presentation of data, while chi square statistics (X^2) was used in testing the hypotheses at 95% level of confidence.

Data Presentation and Analyses

In this section, the data collected through responses from research questions were presented and analyzed.

Table 1: Whether hospitality operators indoctrinate and train their new recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
Yes	60	33.33
No	120	66.67
Total	**180**	**100**

Survey Data, 2018

Table 2: The adequacy of the management of hospitality establishments' empowerment of their staff.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very often	53	29.44
Hardly	127	70.56
Total	**180**	**100**

Survey data, 2018

Table 3: Whether hospitality operators adequately solicit feedback from their customers.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
Yes	62	34.44
No	118	65.56
Total	**180**	**100**

Survey data, 2018.

Table 4: The extent management policies of hospitality firms affect customer satisfaction.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
Serious effect	120	66.67
Little effect	40	22.22
No effect	20	11.11
Total	**180**	**100**

Survey data,2018.

Table 5: The effect of service culture on the profitability of hospitality firms.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
Serious effect	100	55.56
Little effect	42	23.33
No effect	38	21.11
Total	**180**	**100**

Survey data, 2018

Continquency Table

Hypothesis 1: Hospitality operators always indoctrinate and train their new recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations. Mean score 180/2 =90.

OPTIONS	OBSERVED (0)	EXPECTED (e)	(o-e)	(o-e)2/e
Yes	60	90	30	10
No	120		30	10
Total	**180**		**0**	**20**

X^2 calculated (20) is more than X^2 tabulated (3.841) at I degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This means that hospitality operators rarely indoctrinate and train their new recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations.

Hypothesis 2: The extent to which management of hospitality establishments empower their staff is adequate. Mean score 180/2=90.

OPTIONS	OBSERVED (0)	EXPECTED (e)	(o-e)	(o-e)2/e
Very often	53	90	-37	15.21
Hardly	127		37	15.21
Total	**180**		**3.841**	**30.42**

X^2 Calculated (30.42) is more than X^2 tabulated (3.841) at 1 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and this means that the extent to which management of hospitality establishments empower their staff is inadequate.

Hypothesis 3: Hotel operators always solicit feedback from their customers. Mean score=180/2=90.

OPTIONS	OBSERVED (0)	EXPECTED (e)	(o-e)	(o-e)2/e
often	62	90	-28	8.71
Rarely	118		28	8.71
Total	**180**		**0**	**17.42**

X^2 calculated (17.42) is more than X^2 tabulated (3.81) at 1 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative is accepted, therefore hotel operators rarely solicit feedback from their customers.

Hypothesis 4: Management policies of hospitality firms have no significant effect on customer satisfaction if implemented.
Mean Score=180/3=60.

OPTIONS	OBSERVED (0)	EXPECTED (e)	(o-e)	(o-e)2/e
Serious effect	120	60	60	1800
Little effect	40		-20	200
No effect	20		-40	800
Total	180		0	2800
				X^2 tab=5.991

X^2 calculated (2800) is more than X^2 tabulated (5.991) at 1 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative is accepted. This implies that management policies of hospitality firms have significant effect on customer satisfaction if implemented.

Hypothesis 5: Service culture of hospitality firms has no significant effect on their profitability as well as the nation's economic sustainability.

OPTIONS	OBSERVED (0)	EXPECTED (e)	(o-e)	(o-e)2/e
Serious effect	100	60	40	800
Little effect	42		-18	162
No effect	38		-22	242
Total	180		0	1204 X^2 tab=5.991

X^2 calculated (1204) is more than X^2 tabulated (5.991) at 1 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative is accepted and this means that service culture of hospitality firm has significant effect on their profitability as well as the nation's economics sustainability.

Discussion of Findings

It was discovered that the management of most hospitality establishments in Nigeria do not see the need to indoctrinate and train their new recruits on company traditions and their history with customer relations. Under this condition the newly employed will be unaware of the company values and areas of focus, and therefore work parallel to the goals of the management. Peggy (1995) in his eight feasible strategies to sustain customer winning service culture emphasized on this saying, "indoctrinate and train everyone in the culture of the organization as soon as they are hired and let them know how it is the company's backbone.

It was revealed that management of organizations are often unwilling to seriously involve or commit the employees in decision making for fear of high expectations or reward from them. But without this level of commitment, the efficacy of the employees may not be enhanced. Therefore the employees should be equipped with instruments such as power, information, knowledge and reward for a more effective performance (Sarajevo, 2010, Sigh, 2003 & Venkat Ratnam, 2006).

Also deduced from the study was the fact that management lacks the culture of soliciting feedback from their customers possibly for the fear of being challenged by customers' expectations. Yet this is a very reliable strategy for knowing how much customers are satisfied with the performed services or whether their expectations are met. According to Heng *et al*. (2010), in order to satisfy customers and meet their expectations, hotels must be able to understand customers' needs and want and customer feedback channel is an effective and inexpensive means to understand the insight of customers' needs and wants.

The research further revealed that management policies of service organizations, especially hotels, affect customer's satisfaction. This finding was in line with XU and Geodegebune (2005) who found out that the policies and strategies adopted in human resources affect the satisfaction of employees, and employee satisfaction have impact on customer satisfaction. Therefore organizations should

embrace policies favourable to the customer and avoid those that portray management in bad light. Peggy,(1995) posits, "Companies should establish policies that are customer friendly and eliminate all routine and rigid policies and guidelines that will knock them out of business''.

Responses from respondents also showed that hotel operators in Nigeria were not well knowledgeable of the importance of effective service culture in their organizations.

Finally, it was deduced that service culture in hotel firms has serious impact on their profitability as well as the nation's economic sustainability. This is true because positive service culture satisfies a customer, who not only returns next time, but lures more customers to the same organization through positive words of mouth. When this process continues for a long time, profitability is the outcome. This was acknowledged by Zeithaml *et al.* (1996), when they said that companies offering superior services achieve higher than normal market share growth and have increased profitability by charging more than their competitors for similar products.

When profitability is enhanced, hotels can embark on investments like helping village governments to implement different socio-economic development projects like: building schools, dispensaries, bridges, providing clean water and constructing roads.

As their gross earnings increase, government revenue through tax and other charges are reviewed upwards. Hotels also contribute significantly to foreign exchange export earnings of the country. This was acknowledged by Oyibo (2013) when he confirmed that the hospitality industry contributes to the economy, funding a large

percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product, thereby helping to raise the national income.

Conclusion

The inability of the management of hospitality businesses to equip the service contact staff with the necessary orientation and on the job training, the enabling environment to motivate the employees and the authority to make decisions commensurate with their level, has negatively affected their service culture and profitability.

Customer feedback channel, which has been confirmed as an effective and inexpensive tool and which scan the opinions and views of their customers on the acceptability of their services, is not widely practiced by Nigerian hotels. Therefore the chances of taking proactive steps on service quality and customer management may never be there.

The managements of hospitality firms have failed to recognize the fact that customers' needs and expectations are dynamic and that the only way to satisfy them is by constantly giving "on the job training" to the service contact staff so that they will be abreast of changes and developments.

The poor service culture of Nigerian hospitability establishments which has negatively impacted on other profitability, has reasonably affected their contributions to revenue generation and Gross Domestic Product.

Recommendations

1)   The Nigerian hotel operators, through the appropriate arms, should intensify efforts in the enlightenment of their members on the need to continually imbibe quality service culture in their operations.

2) The need for a holistic adoption of staff empowerment mechanism as a sustainable tool for quality service delivery must be made known to the management staff.

3) Nigerian hospitality operators, especially the hoteliers, should be proactive in soliciting feedback from their customers on their opinions and views about service rendered and ways of improvement to meet guests' expectations. They should realize that dissatisfied customers do not always complain directly, and worse still, will not return. Furthermore, they will narrate their experience to potential customers and discourage them; and all these impinge on their survival and profitability.

4) It is of utmost importance that sufficient fund be channeled to the training, remuneration and welfare of hotel employees because they have effect on the quality of service performance.

5) The hospitality industry will play a greater role in managing the Nigerian economy beyond recession if the government subsidizes the private sector in funding the on-the-job training and workshop participations of employees in the sector.

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