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Explore Strategies that the Hospitality Industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia Implemented to Mitigate the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Flackson Zimba [1], Godfrey Mwewa [2] and Francis Simui [2]

[1] *Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia, Zambia.*
[2] *University of Zambia, Zambia, Institute of Distance Education.*
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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the strategies implemented by the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia, to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employs a comprehensive research approach, incorporating qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by the hospitality sector and the effectiveness of the adopted mitigation strategies.

In the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including hotel owners, managers, and government officials, are conducted to explore the adaptive measures and challenges faced. This qualitative exploration aims to uncover the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes that guided the industry's response to the unprecedented crisis.

The quantitative aspect of the research involves the collection and analysis of statistical data related to the financial performance of hospitality establishments in Livingstone Town before, during, and after the pandemic. This quantitative analysis assesses the economic impact of COVID-19 on the industry, providing a quantitative foundation for understanding the severity of the challenges faced by hotels, restaurants, and other businesses within the sector.

To triangulate findings and gain a comprehensive understanding, the study employs a mixed methods approach. This involves integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to identify patterns, correlations, and potential causal relationships between the adopted strategies and the industry's resilience. The mixed methods approach enhances the robustness and validity of the research findings, offering a more holistic perspective on the strategies that proved most effective in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the hospitality sector in Livingstone Town.

The research findings aim to contribute valuable insights to both the academic and practical realms, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and shedding light on the effectiveness of various mitigation strategies. This information is vital for informing future crisis management and resilience-building efforts within the hospitality sector, not only in Livingstone Town but also globally.

Keywords: Hospitality industry, COVID-19 pandemic and Mitigation strategies

1. Introduction

The global economy has been profoundly affected by the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly impacting the hospitality industry. This sector, encompassing hotels, restaurants, tourism, and event management, holds a pivotal role in driving economic growth and employment worldwide (WHO, 2020). Given the ongoing disruptions in travel and restrictions on social gatherings, it is crucial to investigate and comprehend how the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia, has demonstrated resilience in the face of these adverse conditions. The study aims to explore the strategies implemented by the industry to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, recognizing the urgency and importance of understanding its adaptive measures and effectiveness in navigating these unprecedented challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed substantial challenges to the hospitality industry in Livingstone, a city renowned for its vibrant tourism sector. The sector, a crucial economic driver, has been significantly affected by travel restrictions, lockdowns, and a decline in tourist numbers. Despite these challenges, the hospitality industry in Livingstone has demonstrated remarkable resilience. Businesses have adapted by implementing strict health and safety protocols, embracing digital technologies for contactless services, and diversifying offerings to attract local clientele. Some establishments have also engaged in community initiatives to support the local population during these challenging times.

To ensure recovery and future preparedness, it is imperative to analyze and build upon the resilience displayed by the hospitality industry in Livingstone. Strategies may include fostering collaborations between businesses and local authorities, investing in digital infrastructure, and implementing flexible

business models. Additionally, prioritizing sustainability and community engagement will be essential for long-term resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges.

1.1 Background

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry flourished by prioritizing outstanding service, creating memorable experiences, and catering to diverse guest needs. However, the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted these operations significantly, leading to widespread closures, travel constraints, and a sharp decline in revenue. The pandemic induced a noteworthy shift in consumer behavior, with individuals becoming more cautious about travel and social interactions. Governments worldwide implemented stringent health and safety protocols, including social distancing measures, travel restrictions, and capacity limitations, directly impacting the hospitality sector. Although these measures were essential to curb the virus's spread, they had severe consequences for businesses in the industry.

Despite these formidable challenges, the hospitality industry has demonstrated resilience by adopting innovative strategies to adapt to the "new normal." Numerous establishments have embraced technology to provide contactless services, introduce online reservations and check-ins, and enhance cleaning and hygiene protocols to ensure the safety of both guests and employees (United Nations, 2013). Furthermore, the industry has witnessed the emergence of new trends like "staycations" and "workcations," where individuals opt for local alternatives to travel and work remotely from hotels or resorts. These trends have presented opportunities for hotels to sustain operations and generate revenue during the pandemic.

1.2 Operational Definition

The abductive approach or inference to the best explanation is a method of reasoning in which a hypothesis is chosen that, if true, best explains the relevant evidence (Charles Sanders Peirce, 2018).

COVID-19 - Corona virus disease 19 (COVID-19) is a highly transmissible and pathogenic viral infection causing severe acute respiratory syndrome (MA Shereen · 2020). COVID-19-Coronavirus disease 2019 (SAS-COV2) is a type of extreme adversity that impacts people, government, and organizations (Bakar, 2020).

Determinants are factors that decisively affect the nature or outcome of something (independent variables).

Hotel, establishment providing accommodation, meals and other services for travelers and tourists (Oxford Dictionary). A pandemic is defined as "an epidemic occurring over a very wide area, crossing international borders and usually affecting a large number of people" (Porta 2014).

Hospitality is a part of the service industry that deals with the accommodation of guests and related services for tourists, travelers and locals.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This research work was based on the in exploring the resilience of the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of a well-structured theoretical framework is crucial. The Resilience Theory, which concentrates on the ability of systems, organizations, or individuals to bounce back and adapt in the face of adversity, serves as a valuable lens. This framework delves into various contributing factors like flexibility, resourcefulness, and the capacity to learn and change. Researchers applying this theory can dissect the strategies and practices employed by hospitality businesses to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.

To address the research gap, a researcher introduces the Resource-Based Theory or View (RBV), crafted by Birge Wenefeldt in 1984, providing insights into the strategic resilience responses of the hospitality industry. RBV involves analyzing a firm's strategic advantages by examining its unique combination of assets, skills, capabilities, and intangible assets. Emphasizing the significance of resources in the strategic implementation process, the theory highlights that even well-formulated strategies remain in the planning stage without the necessary resources. It views firms with superior systems and structures as profitable not solely due to strategic investments, but because of lower costs or superior product quality, offering a new perspective on competitive advantage.

Another valuable theoretical framework is Organizational Adaptation, addressing how organizations adapt to changes in their environment. Considering factors such as leadership, decision-making processes, and organizational culture, this framework allows researchers to scrutinize how hospitality businesses adjusted their operations, modified business models, and made strategic decisions in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis.

Lastly, Stakeholder Theory centers on the relationships between organizations and stakeholders, encompassing employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. This theoretical lens enables researchers to examine how hospitality businesses engaged with and collaborated with their stakeholders during the pandemic. Initiatives supporting employees, maintaining customer relationships, and contributing to the local community are crucial aspects explored through this framework. The choice of a theoretical framework depends on the specific research objectives and context, with researchers having the flexibility to combine or modify frameworks to suit their research needs.
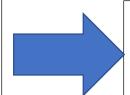
1.3.1 Conceptual framework

Drawing upon the insights gained from an extensive literature review, this study has constructed a conceptual framework rooted in resilience theory. This theoretical underpinning is employed to elucidate the experiences of hospitality managers, offering an understanding of how their decisions and actions reverberate in the socio-economic realm. The term "resilience," derived from the Latin word "resiliere," encapsulates the ability to rebound and retain significance across diverse circumstances, whether pertaining to individuals or groups. Notably, scholarly discussions underscore the pivotal role of bouncing back as a fundamental element of conscious resilience (Aburn et al., 2016).

Within the framework, the study delves into the interplay among various independent variables, including social and economic performance, mental and physical well-being, work attitude, personal emotions, work resources, government policy, personal perception, and resources. These variables collectively influence the resilience of the hospitality industry, which serves as the dependent variable under scrutiny. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the study seeks to explore the strategies adopted by the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia, to mitigate the adverse impact of this global health crisis.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Health and Safety measures
- Employee support and Training
- Promotion local Tourism and Collaboration
- Adoption of digital solution
- Diversification of income streams

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Hospitality industry's resilience during COVID-19 pandemic.
A case of hotels in Livingstone town, Zambia

Material and method

This research, aligning with Creswell's research approaches, employs an abduction approach to qualitatively explore the resilience of the hospitality industry in Livingstone, Zambia, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative methods, specifically in-depth interviews, are utilized to delve into the nuanced experiences of hospitality managers, providing genuine insights into their responses to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. The study, conducted in the tourism hub of Livingstone, involves 16 hospitality companies, representing diverse sectors like hotels, lodges, leisure companies, and national parks. Through simple random sampling, key informants and staff share their perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how various segments within the hospitality industry have navigated the challenges posed by COVID-19.

The city's selection is justified by its economic significance, diverse facilities, and the severe impact of the pandemic on businesses. The research aims to not only shed light on the local context but also to offer valuable insights for broader hospitality studies. Thematic analysis, facilitated by NVivo 12 pro software, is applied to sift through the collected data and identify trends and themes that explain the resilience of the hospitality sector during the pandemic. This approach, focused on interactive data collection and analysis, ensures a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, experiences, and interpretations. The findings seek to inform strategies for future pandemic preparedness and contribute to the industry's recovery, emphasizing the importance of qualitative exploration in understanding the intricacies of the hospitality sector's resilience.

Results and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the global economy, with the hospitality industry facing severe challenges, including closures, job losses, and financial setbacks. In Livingstone Town, Zambia, this study explores the resilience of the local hospitality industry during the pandemic, aiming to understand how businesses in this sector adapted to overcome the challenges and maintain operations. To ensure confidentiality, participants were coded with letters, and data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis using NVivo 12 pro software, following Pajo's recommendations (2018).

The research objectives encompassed examining the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in Livingstone during the pandemic, exploring implemented strategies to mitigate the impact, understanding factors contributing to resilience, and identifying support systems and resources used to sustain operations. Thematic analysis identified key themes such as safety measures, employee support and training, promotion of local tourism, collaboration, and the adoption of digital solutions and income diversification. These strategies aimed at ensuring the safety of guests and employees, supporting staff well-being, stimulating the local economy, and embracing technological solutions.

The study's focus on resilience during the pandemic led to specific research questions, addressing challenges faced by hotels, mitigation strategies in place, factors contributing to resilience, and the support systems and resources utilized. By exploring these aspects, the study aims to provide valuable insights for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers to enhance future resilience and preparedness in the hospitality sector, aligning with the broader goal of contributing to the understanding of the industry's response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Livingstone Town, Zambia.

"It has been in operation since 2001. Okay, how many rooms has it got? 173 rooms. Apart from accommodation, which other services do you all provide? We provide laundry, food, and entertainment, a bit of entertainment. A bit of entertainment….."

This can be seen from the following verbatim quotations: **Participants a,** *"Reduced demand: canceled bookings, travel restrictions and border closures led to a wave of canceled bookings, leaving hotels and lodges with empty rooms and reduced occupancy rates. Decreased domestic tourism-the closure of borders had not only affected international tourists but had also resulted in a decline in tourist arrivals, leading to a substantial loss of revenue for hotels, lodges and other accommodation providers……."*

Adopting services, offering to comply with health challenges or health regulations. *"During that period, health was the number one priority. Of course, COVID-19 was to do more with hygiene.*

So, we invested a lot in hygienic apparatus. So, we did well, though it was a challenge, but we managed. There were no really serious hiccups in terms of health and safety…….."

This study aims to investigate the determinants of resilience within the hospitality industry in Livingstone during the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing valuable insights for stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers. The research objectives involve elucidating challenges faced by the hospitality sector, scrutinizing implemented strategies for mitigating the pandemic's impact, assessing the industry's overall resilience, and identifying support systems and resources crucial for sustaining operations in Livingstone, Zambia. The central focus is on understanding the factors that contributed to the industry's ability to endure and adapt during the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic. The research questions delve into specific challenges faced by hotels, the strategies employed to mitigate these challenges, factors contributing to their resilience, and the support systems and resources utilized. This study not only addresses the immediate concerns of the pandemic's impact on the hospitality sector in Livingstone but also aims to provide a foundation for enhancing future resilience and preparedness within the industry.

"It has been in operation since 1991. Okay, how many rooms has it got? 32 rooms and 5 are under construction. Apart from accommodation, which other services do you all provide? We provide laundry, food, and entertainment, activities desk boat cruise, and game view outsources…"

This study aims to investigate the determinants of resilience within the hospitality industry in Livingstone amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, offering valuable insights to stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers for bolstering the sector's future resilience and preparedness. The research objectives include elucidating the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in Livingstone during the pandemic, scrutinizing implemented strategies to mitigate its impact, assessing the overall resilience of the sector, and identifying support systems and resources crucial for sustaining operations. With a primary focus on the industry's resilience during the pandemic, the research questions delve into specific challenges encountered by hotels, strategies employed to counter the impact of the pandemic, factors contributing to their resilience, and the support systems and resources utilized in Livingstone, Zambia. By addressing these aspects, the study not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the hospitality industry but also contributes to enhancing its ability to navigate and recover from unprecedented crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our business was affected greatly by the COVID pandemic because we had to close down. Our business depends on the international, three quarters of our clients are international tourists. So, with them not coming through to our country, we had to close…."

"And by then we didn't know what measures were supposed to be taken in order for us to keep operating. So as a result, we were affected. And when the government had put in measures that we had to follow in order to contain the situation, we were out of business for a certain period of time. From 2019, it was up to 2021, I think. And during that period, our workers were home……"

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought profound challenges upon the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia. Renowned for its tourism, the town faced a substantial decline in demand, causing decreased bookings, event cancellations, and low occupancy rates for hotels and resorts. This, in turn, led to substantial income loss, forcing many establishments to either temporarily or permanently close, with some relying on government support or loans for survival. Implementing stringent health and safety measures posed additional challenges, as the nature of the hospitality industry requires close interactions between staff and guests, resulting in increased operational costs and the need for adherence to sanitation protocols. Labor issues emerged with widespread layoffs, creating economic consequences for individuals and communities heavily dependent on the industry for employment. The disruption of the supply chain, coupled with an uncertain timeline for recovery, further complicated the industry's ability to plan for the future.

In Livingstone Town, the study delved into the economic impact, health and safety measures, travel restrictions, uncertainty, and fear as major themes affecting the hospitality industry during the pandemic. Economic hardships, operational cost increases, and financial strain were highlighted by participants, emphasizing the severe economic impact on businesses. Health and safety measures, including mandatory checks and disinfection protocols, brought additional costs and challenges in reassuring customers about safety. The closure of borders and travel restrictions heavily impacted international tourism, resulting in financial strain, increased operational costs, and the accumulation of debt for many businesses. Uncertainty and fear among tourists further exacerbated the challenges faced by the industry, as attracting customers and regaining trust proved to be a daunting task. Overall, the study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges and responses within the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global hospitality industry has encountered unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, profoundly affecting operations and financial stability (Smith, 2020). Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and social distancing measures have led to a substantial decline in travel and tourism activities, resulting in a sharp drop in customer demand for hospitality services (Jones et al., 2021). Hotels, resorts, and accommodation providers experienced reduced bookings, event cancellations, and low occupancy rates, leading to a significant loss of income (Gössling et al., 2020). This financial strain forced many businesses in the sector to close temporarily or permanently, relying on government support or loans for survival (Acharya et al., 2021).

The nature of the hospitality industry, involving close interaction between staff and guests, presented significant health and safety challenges during the pandemic (Sigala, 2020). Strict sanitation and hygiene protocols, including improved cleaning measures, regular disinfection, and enforcement of masking policies, were implemented, posing challenges for businesses, especially smaller facilities with limited resources (Hall et al., 2021). The crisis resulted in widespread layoffs across the industry, causing profound economic consequences for individuals and communities dependent on the sector for employment (Nicola et al., 2020).

Livingstone Town in Zambia, reliant on its vibrant tourism industry, faced severe economic impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study exploring the challenges in the local hospitality industry identified five major themes: economic impact, health and safety measures, travel restrictions, uncertainty, and fear (Researcher et al., 2023). Tourism, a major revenue source, came to a halt with travel restrictions and lockdowns, leading to decreased revenue, financial difficulties for businesses, and increased unemployment (Researcher et al., 2023). The uncertainty surrounding the pandemic's duration and severity created fear among tourists, drastically decreasing tourist numbers (Researcher et al., 2023).

In discussions, a report on Livingstone Town aimed to explore the resilience of the hospitality industry during the pandemic (Researcher et al., 2023). Strategies adopted by establishments included the implementation of health and safety protocols, flexible cancellation policies, and the use of digital platforms for marketing (Researcher et al., 2023). Government support and initiatives, including financial assistance programs and training, played a role in industry resilience (Researcher et al., 2023). Challenges such as the shift towards domestic tourism, promotion of local attractions, and service diversification were addressed (Researcher et al., 2023). The report evaluates the overall resilience, assessing the industry's ability to adapt, maintain operations, and sustain employment during the pandemic (Researcher et al., 2023). Insights and recommendations are provided for future crisis management and recovery strategies, ensuring the long-term sustainability and growth of the hospitality sector in Livingstone Town (Researcher et al., 2023)

Conclusion and Recommendation

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town, Zambia, demonstrated resilience through a comprehensive set of strategies. Recognizing the paramount importance of health and safety, businesses implemented stringent protocols, including temperature checks, heightened sanitation measures, and the provision of hand sanitizers. This not only safeguarded the well-being of guests and staff but also contributed to rebuilding trust in the sector. Simultaneously, the industry embraced digital transformation, adopting online booking systems, mobile check-ins, and digital menus to minimize physical contact and enhance the overall guest experience. The integration of technology showcased adaptability and a forward-thinking approach to meet evolving consumer expectations.

Moreover, the industry in Livingstone exhibited a commendable commitment to community engagement and support. Some establishments took part in initiatives such as providing meals to frontline workers, supporting local charities, and participating in community events. This not only contributed to the well-being of the local population during challenging times but also fostered positive relationships between businesses and the community. Additionally, businesses showcased flexibility in their models by diversifying offerings to attract local markets, demonstrating a capacity to adapt and innovate in response to changing circumstances. These collaborative and adaptive strategies underscore the resilience of Livingstone's hospitality industry and provide a blueprint for recovery and future preparedness in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Recommendations

Moving forward, the hospitality industry in Livingstone Town should consider several recommendations to further enhance its resilience and ensure sustained recovery. First and foremost, continued investment in digital infrastructure and technology is essential. This involves not only maintaining the implemented contactless services but also exploring innovations such as augmented reality for virtual tours, immersive online experiences, and targeted digital marketing campaigns. Embracing emerging technologies will not only keep businesses competitive but also position Livingstone as a tech-savvy and adaptable destination.

Furthermore, fostering collaboration within the industry and with local authorities is crucial for long-term success. Establishing a unified approach to marketing and safety standards can enhance the overall appeal of Livingstone as a destination. Moreover, the industry should explore sustainable practices, promoting eco-friendly initiatives and responsible tourism. Collaborative efforts can include joint promotional campaigns, shared resources, and the creation of a support network for businesses. By working together and prioritizing sustainability, Livingstone's hospitality industry can not only recover from the pandemic but also build a more resilient and forward-looking sector for the future.

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