

Measures Used to Sustain Hospitality and Tourism Industry During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Selected Establishments in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explored sustainability measures used in the hospitality and tourism industry and determined their effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected towns in the Copperbelt Province.

Methods: With an interpretative stance, a phenomenology qualitative research was conducted among 15 participants who were purposively selected. Data were collected using interviews and analyzed thematically.

Result: We found out that measures are used to sustain the hospitality and tourism industry. The majority of the participants effectively used the measures to sustain their establishments while a few did not. There is a need for preparedness in the industry in case of any adverse changes occurring in the environment

Contribution: This research contributes a qualitative interpretation of how the hospitality and tourism industry sustained itself during the COVID-19 era. It provides a basis for informed decision-making in sustaining the industry amidst uncertainties

Originality: The study used a qualitative perspective to understand phenomena regarding the sustainability of tourism during the pandemic which was novel in Kitwe District.

Keywords: Measures, Sustainability, Hospitality, and Tourism Establishments, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry is one of the most dependable sectors of economic development. This sector can contribute significantly to the growth of the nation's economy if it is properly managed and sustained. [Manzoor, Wei, Asif, Haq, and Rehman \(2019\)](#) agree that an increase in tourism can bring positive economic outcomes to nations, especially in gross domestic product and employment opportunities. The hospitality and tourism industry also expands the foreign exchange reserves of nations. [Ampofo \(2020\)](#) contends that the hospitality and tourism industry generates jobs and nurtures innovation and entrepreneurial tendencies. Additionally, [Dogra \(2020\)](#) confirms that this industry currently contributes about 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). The hospitality and tourism industry are a good source of revenue.

Zambia recognizes the importance of the hospitality and tourism industry to the economy. In agreement, the Ministry of Finance Planning and Development ([MFPD \(2020:33\)](#)) points out that the Seventh National Development Plan recognizes the industry as a contributing factor to national development. This is because, in Zambia, the hospitality and tourism industry have the potential to be developed and serve as a



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major source of revenue for economic growth. National Policy on Tourism provides a strategic framework for the sustainable development of tourism so that it can realize its full potential (Ministry of Tourism and Arts, 2015).

However, the industry faces a crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) warns of the pandemic resulting in over 50 million job losses worldwide in the hospitality and tourism industry. Similarly, global estimates suggest a rapidly deteriorating jobs risk situation in the tourism sector, which projects job losses increasing from 50 to 75 million (Consumer Unity and Trust Society International and United Nations Development Program, 2020).

Zambia has experienced the impact of COVID-19 and the hospitality and tourism industry has had its share. MFPD (2020:33) designates the tourism sector as one of the most affected sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in the loss of income and many jobs. Consequently, the pandemic has negatively impacted the growth rate of the economy in Zambia. Policy Monitoring Research Centre (PMRC) (2020) estimated the GDP growth rate to get lower than 2%. This means that there will be a reduction in the number of goods and services produced by the country with spill-over effects such as hikes in the prices of goods and services. Furthermore, CUTS and UNDP (2020) observe the adverse effects of any limitations to travel on tourist visits and jobs without government financial bailouts. According to PMRC (2020), some hotels recorded a reduction in bed occupancy from 50% to 20%. For instance, the first 3 months of 2020 saw a drop in about 14 000 international visitors which has consequently led to a reduction in funding for environmental conservation (Consumer Unity & Trust Society and United Nations Development Plan, 2020). This has led to a decrease in incomes and the hotels have to find solutions to such problems.

Reduction in international and domestic visitations results in the need for sustainability measures to keep hospitality and tourism afloat. The organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) cautions that as the most directly affected sector in this crisis, tourism requires immediate and long-term responses. The hospitality and tourism industry needs sustainable measures to sustain it. The situation calls for efforts to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic to support a sustainable and inclusive recovery of the tourism sector (OECD, 2020). In Zambia, the “Government has put in place tax relief measures and other Government interventions to reinvigorate the tourism sector” (Ministry of Finance Planning and Development (MPD, 2020:33). Sustainability measures used need to be examined to determine their influence on the sustenance of the hospitality and tourism industry.

The hospitality and tourism industry are one of the viable means for economic development. It contributes to the economic development of Zambia. Zambia is striving to improve this sector of the economy so that it can be improved. However, this industry has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. PMRC (2020) observes a reduction in the demand for goods and services in the hospitality and tourism industry from 50% to 20%. These statistics are indicative of the devastating effects that the pandemic has had on the industry. The hospitality and tourism industry needs to sustain itself during this period of the pandemic. MPD (2020) plans to intervene and boost the industry. This is because if the situation is not addressed accordingly, the industry will collapse and result in adverse effects, economically and socially. The industry requires urgent action to address the challenges it is facing. This, therefore, necessitates this study endeavoring to examine how the hospitality and tourism industry was sustained during the COVID era.

This study provides insights into the situation of the hospitality and tourism industry as regards its sustenance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Practically, it provides a reference for sustainability measures that positively impacted the industry and those which should be avoided in the future. It has shown different ways which were used to sustain the industry at various levels

Theoretical Framework

A contingent organizational framework applicable in this study depends on internal and external attributes affecting its operation. The framework contributed to perceiving strategies reflective of environmental change in the hospitality and tourism industry. In this case, COVID-19 was an external environment while the workforce was internal. It helped to examine the sustainability of the industry by considering how COVID-19 affected the industry and related measures developed to survive during the covid-19 era. [Seagar \(2021\)](#) observes that to have a successful operational resilience framework, an organization needs to know the risks to its operations. An organization cannot be resilient if it doesn't have an awareness of the threats that could disrupt its operations and its delivery to customers.

COVID 19 Prevalence

The hospitality and tourism industry are depicted as one of the sectors which are worst hit by the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the outbreak, hospitality and tourism goods and services are still required in one way or the other. It is the resilience of the industry in responding to the effects of the pandemic which calls for sustainable measures to ensure continued existence. Reviewed were sustainability measures employed in hospitality and tourism. The impact of Covid-19 on world tourism is unquestionable. A study which was conducted by [Ramelli and Wagner \(2020\)](#) confirmed that the world had not faced an economic crisis as bad as what is being experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sustainability Measures

[Ghana Tourism Agency \(2021\)](#) enlisted some measures used to sustain the hospitality and tourism sector by embarking on more media campaigns than before to educate members and considered promoting domestic tourism to make up for the loss incurred due to the non-availability of international travel. The agency also improved safety and hygiene as aspects that needed more attention than ever during the pandemic. It ensured that all establishments observed enhanced hygiene procedures by providing running water and soap for the washing of hands and hand sanitizers as well as social distancing. Earlier on [Kang Li \(2020\)](#) hinted at the need to improve the customers' perception of safety. Another measure suggested was the implementation of technological innovations and risk reduction strategies ([Kang Li, 2020; Shin and King \(2020\)](#)). Furthermore, [Shin and King \(2020\)](#) declared that for the hospitality industry to survive, innovative strategies should be adopted. They envisaged that the hospitality industry could gain the trust back of their customers which could help the industry to survive. [Hu, Liu, and Yu \(2020\)](#) indicated the need for management teams of establishments to maintain good communication with their respective corporate clients to keep up with their travel and reservation policy updates.

Effects of COVID-19 on Hospitality and Tourism

Uğur and Akbiyik (2020) noted adverse economic effects and human suffering which has resulted in a decreased potential labor force. Direct consequences of the pandemic are temporal reduction in working time and/or eventual stoppage as measures to contain the pandemic. Economic activity is also affected by restricted movements and behavioral changes that cause tourists to avoid COVID-19 risky regions. In some instances, corona crisis brought worldwide travel traffic to a standstill.

Ghana Tourism Agency (2021) explains that businesses resorted to shutdowns, booking cancellations, revenue drops, and lay-offs among others. Such actions hospitality and tourism industry negatively where accommodation, transportation, and souvenir shop operators compared to food and beverages establishments are concerned. Approximately 40 percent of employees of hotels, restaurants, and travel and tour operators took their leave, and a quarter was laid off.

The Zambian hospitality and Tourism industry has also suffered the negative impacts of the pandemic. Tabetando (2020) observes the COVID-19 pandemic as a major threat to Zambia's tourism sector which has ultimately led to the closure of some businesses and interruption of economic recovery after the reopening of international travel.

This study contributes to the literature by showing how the industry applied measures to sustain itself during the pandemic. So far, past studies focused on the extent of damage caused by COVID-19. A step further has been taken to examine coping strategies that led to sustaining the industry.

The literature reviewed indicates some quantitative data on the effects of the pandemic on the industry. This study provides a qualitative dimension to the area through the use of detailed descriptions of the pandemic phenomenon concerning the industry's sustainability. Salient features in the reviewed literature are indicative of the prevalence of COVID-19 and how it has affected the hospitality and tourism industry. The review has illustrated how the industry has resorted to instituting measures for sustaining it. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the performance of the Hospitality and tourism industry to understand the measures the industry was using to remain sustainable during the covid-19 era. The study focused on the Copperbelt and adopted the contingency theory since the theory looks at how decisions are made in organizations based on the internal and external environment.

Research Method

Ethical considerations were taken into account by getting permission from the directorate of research at the university as well as the Hospitality and Catering Association of Zambia. Participants have availed the nature of the research and were informed of their voluntary involvement.

With an interpretative stance, this study used a phenomenology qualitative research design to conduct the study. It explored and obtained an in-depth understanding of events (Palinkas et al., 2015) and explained events from the perspective of those who experienced them (Teherani, 2015). Transcendental phenomenology helped to understand the essence of a phenomenon under study (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019). Fifteen participants comprised were drawn from workers with experience in the hospitality and tourism industry located in Kitwe, on the Copperbelt. Palinkas et al. (2015) justify the inclusion of participants with experience because they have detailed information.

Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, will be used to select a sample with the required experiences. Participants who possess knowledge and experience in hospitality and tourism will be chosen to provide the required data. All participants provided informed consent to partake in the study before taking part in the study.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. People with different job positions were involved to enable the study to capture and improve group dynamics and sharing in the talks (Loeb, Penrod, and Hupcey, 2006). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted electronically using phone calls and zoom meetings. Sweet (2002) supports the use of electronic media as a worthwhile data collection approach. Interviews were recorded followed by transcription of verbatim and identification of each participant involved. Researchers reviewed each transcription before analyzing them.

A thematic approach was used to analyze data and search for categories followed by emerging patterns and themes. Grounded theory was used to identify categories and concepts that emerged from data and link concepts to substantive formal theories (Bernard, 2000, 443). In this study, an explanatory model was developed based on the mapping of relations between the codes (Bruehl, 2020).

In qualitative research, credibility is obtainable from participants whose experience of the phenomenon studied forms a basis for validating results. Member checking was used to validate, verify or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Birt, et. al., 2016). Participants verified the results to confirm the true reflection of their experience about measures for sustaining the hospitality and tourism industry during the pandemic.

Result and Discussion

The table below is a description of the samples in the study:

Table 1. Sample Size	
Participants	
Male	11
Female	4
Position	
Managerial Position	8
Other Position	7
Work Experience	
Majority	10
Others	5

The above table shows that of the 15 participants interviewed, four were female while 11 were male. Out of these, eight held managerial positions whereas others held other positions. The majority of them, ten, had more than four years of work experience in hospitality and tourism establishments.

The interviews conducted provided the required data for the study. Data saturation was reached after the repetition of concepts was noticed. Fusch and Ness (2015) explain that saturation is reached when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained.

This study ascertained the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality and tourism establishments. Most of the participants agreed that the establishments were affected by the pandemic. From the responses, loss of revenue through reduced sales

in food and beverage services, and low room occupancy among others, were noted. Responses from the participants underlie;

Loss of revenue affected many of the establishments negatively. Evidence of this is shown in what one of the participants said:

"The Most noticeable effect has been reduced sales which have resulted in our inability to fully sustain the payroll." (Hotel Manager).

Where the loss of revenue was incurred through reduced goods and services. One of the participants revealed that:

"We have been experiencing loss of revenue through; reduced sales in food and beverages services, accommodation, and meetings." (Lodge Manager).

Similarly, the above findings were also noted by the [Ghana Tourism Agency \(2021\)](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in revenue drops, booking cancellations, and layoffs in the hospitality and tourism industry.

It was also revealed that a reduced number of clientele, as well as reduced room occupancy, were other ways in which the establishments were affected. This is evidenced by the explanations below:

"Reduced clientele is noticeable, our main clients are learners and now that they have closed, It's even worse. We just have to rely on other clients that know about us or have visited our website before," (Ranch Manager).

Another participant lamented that:

"The number of people who come to stay here has gone down. We receive only one or two per day and sometimes no one comes to sleep here"

"Yes, our hotel has been affected by the pandemic, we are experiencing very low room occupancy" (Hotel Manager).

This finding is in line with that of the [Policy Monitoring and Research Centre \(2020\)](#) which explains that some hotels in the hospitality and tourism industry recorded a reduction in bed occupancy from 50% to 20%.

On the contrary, one participant explained that the pandemic had increased the number of visits, especially those that make use of the services at the bar. One of the workers at a lodge explained that:

"Selling beer at our bar has increased because people feel safe drinking at a bar located at a lodge." (Director of a lodge).

Participants were asked if they sustained their establishments. Responses from interviews conducted showed that most of the hospitality and tourism establishments sustained their businesses.

Participants indicated that they sustained their businesses in many ways. One of them said

"We have been sustaining the business through revenues generated from food, beverages, and accommodation." (Lodge Manager).

Under these establishments being income-generating ventures, they needed to sustain their businesses.

The establishment operators expressed their feelings about how they had to sustain the businesses. The findings revealed that hospitality and tourism establishments strived to sustain themselves. They planned and devised measures that suited the management of the institution during the COVID-19 era. They had to make adjustments to suit the prevailing environment. In an interview, one of the participants stated:

"In our case, management sat down to devise strategies on how to approach the situation to respond to the prevailing situation". The other participant indicated that: *"To respond to the COVID-19 situation, management decided to review plans by canceling some of the projects which were not relevant"*.

The change that the establishments had to undergo was not easy. This was because many of the participants faced difficulties to adjust to the situation under COVID-19. One of the participants, a director of a lodge, explained that:

"It was challenging, fearful, and difficult to work under the new situation"

Similarly, the other participant expressed his feelings thus:

"My friends and I were scared of contracting the disease which affected how we performed"

They compared their current situation to the old one and decided to make some adjustments where it was applicable. Similarly, [Gagne \(2020\)](#) reported adjustments made which went up to 75% when compared with March 2019 which translated to a 30% drop-in room prices. The hospitality and tourism establishments changed the way they used to operate to suit the prevailing situation.

The study revealed that some of the hospitality and tourism establishments sustained themselves amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. They put up measures for sustenance. Some of the measures that participants pointed out were:

The outcome from the participants showed that hotels were vigorously marketing the hotel products for them to sustain their businesses. This was done through advertising the hotel products and services using various forms of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and websites. Some participants said that:

"Uhh, basically we do a lot of marketing, we have a Facebook page." (Hotel Manager).

" We have a website where we advertise." (Ranch Manager).

Other establishments reached out to their clients using public addresses and visitations. One of the participants said:

"We visit different companies and make sure we have corporate clients because, with these, we are sure because they are always our clients." (Lodge Manager).

The other participant commented:

"We carry out outreach programs in schools because they are our main clients." (Ranch Manager).

These findings relate to what other studies reported elsewhere. Notably, the use of Facebook and WhatsApp for marketing to sustain the industry. [Basera \(2018\)](#) reports that media is the most used strategy in marketing the resort with the internet being the most used followed by brochures.

[Hu, Liu, and Yu \(2020\)](#) also noted the importance of the need for the management teams of establishments to dedicate efforts to maintain good communication with their respective corporate clients to keep up with their travel and reservation policy updates during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The promotion of local tourism was another strategy of sustenance that was mentioned by the participants. One participant said:

"We have been encouraging local people to use the hotel"

Another respondent also explained that:

"We have redesigned menus to suit the local people"

[The Ghana Tourism Agency \(2021\)](#) noted that they had embarked on educating members and considered promoting domestic tourism since international travels were not happening and we had to do something to keep our heads afloat.

Cutting down on the labor force was indicated as another sustenance measure. From the findings, most of the establishments revealed that the biggest cost went to the wage bill. As a crisis management strategy, most of the establishments resorted to using measures for reducing manpower for them to remain sustainable. This was confirmed by all the establishments which participated in the interviews. One participant revealed that:

"We had to cut down a few employees and we have changed the calendar of some departments so that they work for only 15 days in a month to reduce the payroll strain" (Hotel Manager).

Consumer Unity and Trust Society International and [United Nations Development Program \(2020\)](#) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased job losses in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Further, according to the findings, cost reduction was achieved by using stringent measures. Some of these measures included enforcing regulations on the use of company resources.

One of the participants revealed that:

"We have also decided to control the movement of the vehicles to reduce the cost of fuel." (Hotel Manager).

The use of multi-skilled workers was among some of the measures mentioned. For example. one of the participants said:

"Our hotel assigns more than one role to workers that are trained in multiple skills related to hospitality and tourism, recycling water for the garden and a fish pond for the staff canteen" (Hotel Manager).

Some of the establishments have resorted to purchasing items from wholesale rather than retail shops, as well as opting to use whole potatoes instead of frozen chips, which are comparatively expensive.

Meanwhile, others have suspended all capital projects such as painting the premises, building more rooms, buying more furniture, and other projects. The other participant mentioned that:

"We have resorted to using our farm produce like vegetables, milk, chickens, pork, and many others".

Cost reduction was applied in different ways to ensure the continued operation of the businesses. Some of the measures were specific to each establishment.

These findings on the use of cost-reduction strategies as a sustenance measure were confirmed by [Shin and King \(2020\)](#) who suggested that by implementing technological innovations and cost-reduction strategies the hospitality industry can survive.

Furthermore, flexible room rates were revealed as one of the sustenance measures. Interestingly, few participants indicated that they had introduced flexible room rates and packages for various services. For example, one participant stated that

"We are giving promotional incentives to clients such as corporate charges and discounted prices"

It was also noted that most of the establishments adhered to the COVID-19 guidelines. Adherence was a way of ensuring the sustenance of businesses during the pandemic. Some of the ways included: Making sure that social distancing was maintained, requesting clients to mask up all the time, and sanitizing and disinfecting the premises.

One participant indicated that:

"We are ensuring that we adhere to all the COVID-19 guidelines so that clients can continue coming" (Lodge Front Desk Personnel)

Another one revealed that:

"We have also been following the guidelines and make sure we fumigate the premises so that those that intend to come through do so without fear of getting the disease." (Hotel Manager).

These findings were similar to what was indicated by the [Ghana Tourism Agency \(2021\)](#) in which all establishments were to observe enhanced hygiene procedures by providing running water and soap for washing hands and hand sanitizers as well as social distancing. In the same [Vein, Kang Li \(2020\)](#) also stated that for the hospitality industry to survive, innovative strategies should be adopted and the customers' perception of safety improved.

In adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines, results indicated that some establishments instituted measures to decongest their premises. Redesigning menus by serving food on take away package basis, reducing the number of people allowed on the premises for meetings and other events. Similarly, [Hu, Liu, and Yu \(2020\)](#) argued that hoteliers needed to diversify their products amid the pandemic such as providing takeaway services.

The measures used to sustain the hospitality and tourism establishments were discussed in terms of how effective they were in ensuring sustainability. The study

revealed that the majority of the participants indicated that the measures they had put in place were very effective in sustaining their establishments during the COVID-19 pandemic, while a few did not achieve the benefits of the measures they had.

As regards the use of the premises, one of the participants stated:

"We receive quite a several visitors at this lodge because we observe safety and hygiene rules and they have confidence that it is safe here" (Director)

The findings indicated that the majority of the hospitality and tourism establishments sustained their business operations to some extent. While some of them managed to operate, others failed. Notably, the majority of the establishments were self-sustaining whereas a few did not. Responsible ministries have provisions for helping hospitality and tourism establishments to sustain themselves so that they can remain operational. Those few establishments that could not sustain themselves have to be provided for so that they are sustained according to the expectations of the ministries.

Operators of the hospitality and tourism establishments were not ready to embrace changes that were brought about by the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency of the pandemic posed a challenge to most establishments because they were not prepared. This meant operators had to make haste decisions in response to the new development that had befallen them. They made adjustments to the way they operated their businesses and canceled some of their projects. With these changes, some establishments managed to sustain themselves while some failed to respond to the swift demand. [Gagne \(2020\)](#) compared the revenue earned before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and suggested that the establishments embark on ways of sustaining their businesses. The establishments were compelled to adjust according to the prevailing situation during the pandemic.

The majority of the establishments experienced the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of their businesses. Affected areas included loss of revenue through reduced sales of food and beverages services and clientele. The establishments were adversely affected in some ways. Some contradictions were noted. While the majority of establishments were badly affected, a few were not. There were variations in how the establishments were affected. Income generation was reduced and this had a trickle-down effect on the sustenance of the businesses. Notably, this compelled operators to decrease manpower because of high wage bills compared to the low income earned. In agreement, [Ghana Tourism Agency \(2020\)](#) and [PMRC \(2020\)](#) viewed the hospitality and tourism industry establishments as being adversely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and this was evidenced by the negative effects experienced in their operations.

To sustain the industry, measures were devised. Some of the measures were context-specific while others applied to all. These measures were put up to enable hospitality and tourism establishments to sustain themselves. This, therefore, implies that the establishments had to engage in crisis management measures to ensure the continuity of the operations of their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Liu and Yu \(2020\)](#) indicate the need for hotel and tourism establishments to implement measures to sustain their establishments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings indicated that measures were applied to sustain the establishments. While some of the measures were effective, others were not. The majority used effective measures to win the confidence of their customers through observance of safety rules while a few whose measures were not effective lost out. The layout of the

premises was another effective measure that promoted the business. The use of different approaches to advertising goods and services was effective in sustaining the hospitality and tourism business.

Conclusively, it has been revealed that COVID-19 caused establishments to respond to the effects in a variety of ways. Not all the ways were effective in sustaining the establishments. The preparedness of operators is important as a measure for sustaining operations that are susceptible to changes in an environment.

Conclusion

The study explored the sustainability of the Hospitality and Tourism Industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conclusions drawn from the findings and discussions are that the hospitality and tourism sector can thrive amidst a crisis such as COVID-19. Sustaining the establishments calls for the application of appropriate measures which are responsive to the prevailing situation. The findings provide evidence that establishments used measures to sustain the operations of the businesses.

These measures have to a larger extent been helping some establishments to remain sustainable amid the pandemic. It can be concluded that while some of the measures were effective, others were not. There is a need for operators of the hospitality and tourism industry to be flexible so that they can respond to inevitable situations.

This study has shown that the operators should not only devise measures but that they should share some of their experiences if they are to withstand the unprecedented pressure exerted by the changing environment. It can therefore be concluded that the majority of the hospitality and tourism establishments' self-sustained their businesses during the COVID -19 pandemic. As much as this is proving to be effective, it can be enhanced by help from the government and other stakeholders.

Some of the limitations include that it was carried out during the midst of the pandemic, for this reason, some establishments were non-operational. Therefore, future research can consider a bigger sample size with sufficient resources.

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