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Covid-19 and Tourism Potential in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area of Cross River State

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent to which the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 correlated with tourism potential in Calabar Municipal LGA of Cross River State. To achieve the purpose of the study, two null hypotheses were generated to guide the study. Review of literature was done in line with the sub-variables of the study. A correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 184 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified random and purposive sampling techniques from a population of 920 hospitality establishment employees. Data collection was achieved using a modified four-point Likert scale questionnaire tagged "Impact of COVID-19 and Tourism Potential Questionnaire (ICOVID-19 & TPQ)" which consisted of 24 items. The instrument was validated by two experts of Test and Measurement in the Department of Educational Foundations in the University of Calabar and the supervisor. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to analyze the hypotheses which were tested at .05 level of significance and 182 degrees of freedom. Each of social and financial impacts of COVID-19 were revealed to have statistically significant relationships with tourism potential. It is based on the study's finding that among others, it was recommended that the advent of the pandemic should encourage people to seek for diverse ways in which tourism-based social activities can be engaged in or conducted even in the face of another pandemic to avoid a total shutdown of tourism-based social activities.

Introduction

In recent times, tourism has increasingly been found to impact significantly on the socio-economic development of numerous countries. The desire of people to travel for tourism is very much on the rise that investments in tourism appear to be the order of the day. The extent which it has proven to be a surprisingly strong and resilient economic activity coupled with serving as an important fundamental contributor to revenue generation and job creation is increasingly recognized by many communities, societies and countries. It is globally viewed as the major catalyst for growing an economy in such a manner that it generates employment opportunities as well as other basic social amenities for the consumption of the people.

The constituents of the tourism industry range from small scale local businesses to multinational organizations and as a service industry, it consists of the numerous sectors. According to Oruonye and Ahmed (2020), it consists of the following – (i) both natural and man-made destination attractions; (ii) hospitality - this includes hotels, lodges, camping(s), resorts, motels, tourist homes (including farmhouses), guesthouses, restaurants, cafes, eateries (fast food joints) among others; (iii) all manner of transportation modes (air, water, road, rail and foot); (iv) entertainment services which include casinos, social halls, churches and mosques; (v) information services for travel agencies (for all forms of transportation), tour operators, event management companies, etc.; (vi) government agencies for conservatories with legal frameworks for which they were established; (vii) educational and research institutions, and; (viii) stakeholders and their services (i.e., shareholders such as the local community, local and state governments).

The concept of tourism potential according to Gamidullaeva, Vasin, Tolstykh and Zinchenko (2022) is a set of opportunities for utilising the tourism resources of a given territory to form unique demanded tourism products which are attractive for tourists. According to them, being that the development of tourism in any given certain area is accompanied by the on-going process of developing and forming an assortment of competitive tourism products, it is best when viewing the tourism potential of a given territory from a systems perspective. From a systems perspective, the tourism potential of a territory is viewed as a synergy of the resources concerned with the natural recreation, socio-cultural, investment and financial, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial dimensions within the given territory (Gamidullaeva et al., 2022). The natural recreation resources refer to all manner of natural and ecological resources for recreation – flora, fauna, aquatic sceneries and unique terrestrial landforms. Socio-cultural resources refer to the network of social relations, quality of human resources, and availability of each of, required manpower/labour force, historical cultural heritage, and educational/research institutions under the five sub-dimensions of – social, human, demographic, cultural, and educational/scientific.

Investment and financial resources refer to the territory's capacity to invest and provide finances for the operations and production process as it concerns the sustainable development and productivity of a/the tourism product. Infrastructure resources refer to the availability and

adequate connections between the wide range of modern tourism structures required for the sustainable development and productivity of a/the tourism product while entrepreneurial resources refer to the organizational, technical and information capabilities of small, medium and large scale enterprises, and other economic entities engaged in entrepreneurial activities within the given territory that are used to obtain entrepreneurial profit.

Within the study area, there abounds an abundance of tourism potential. Starting with the natural recreation resources, the tourism potentials consists of the natural sceneries that can be noticed along the Cross River across from the Beach Market, the lush green fields around the Calabar Stadium area, and many other hitherto unknown areas that have not been discovered. For the socio-cultural resources, the people of the area are very friendly and welcoming to strangers (Eseovwe & Diakpomrere, 2021), and, there is a veritable pool of each of quality of human resources, and the required manpower/labour force for the variety of operations and production of tourism products (Okwoche, 2022). In terms of cultural heritage, there are numerous popular dances, masquerades, and plays which include Moninkim, Ekombi, Abang, Onene, Ekpawor, Akata, Ekpe, Otambembe, Nnabo, Obhon, Atat, Ekak, Esinsibhi, OkpoUkongUkom, EkpenyongNnuk, Mgbe, Angbu, Ukwa, Idang, etc., this being indicative of the rich cultural heritage within the area.

There is also the globally renowned "Calabar Festival", every December with a month-long period of events such as The Christmas Tree-Light, Walk against HIV, Music Concert, Boat Regatta, Miss African Beauty Pageant, Cultural Carnival, Bikers Carnival, Carnival Calabar, International Carnival and Street Party which attracts tourists from all parts of the world on an annual basis (Eseovwe & Diakpomrere, 2021). There are also renowned educational institutions where scientific research is undertaken that attracts tourists in the area. Within the area, the investment and financial resources dimension as it concerns tourism potential is evidential in the manner in which tourism-based operations and production processes have been invested into since the turn of the Millennium (Eseovwe & Diakpomrere, 2021).

As for the infrastructure resources dimension, there are numerous hospitality establishments such as Metropolitan Hotels, Hogis suites, Channel View, Monty Suite, Azari, Mega Hilton, Orange Resort, many renowned restaurants, eateries and guesthouses where there are rich mouth-watering cultural and continental cuisines on offer, a conservatory (Drill Ranch), numerous transportation modes and their information services (Igwe, Otaba & Edem, 2022). Lastly, there are also numerous entrepreneurial outfits within the area in which people engage in entrepreneurial activities in order to obtain entrepreneurial profits. The tourism potential within the study area was undergoing the process of being gradually harnessed until an event which started somewhat quietly in a city in China towards the end of 2019 ended up changing the dynamics of daily human endeavour on a global scale like never before.

On December 8, 2019, the first case of the deadly Coronavirus (COVID-19) was reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). Before middle

January, 2020, the deadly virus was transmitted to many other parts of the whole world, giving rise to uncertain and unstable situations. The pandemic's spread was officially deemed to have reached Nigeria on 27th February, 2020 when an Italian travelled into the country through the Lagos International Airport (Chinwe, Mathew & Bigman, 2021). The passenger in question came from Milan, Italy (the 4th country with high incidence of 371 cases as at February, 2020). The passenger worked with a multinational Company in Ogun State and after exhibiting some symptoms associated with the virus, he was tested and confirmed COVID-19 positive. On 9th March, 2020, the 2nd was reported in the same area by a Nigerian who had close contact with the Italian. After those two incidences, more cases were discovered on daily basis in other parts of the country thus necessitating remedial strategies by the government. It was after the second reported case that the Federal Government set up a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 on 9th March, 2020, with similar COVID-19 task forces being set up at the state levels to work in collaboration with the PTF (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020).

Measures such as lockdown, social distancing, self-isolation or self-quarantine, and observation of simple hygiene habits of regular washing of hands, wearing of facemasks and covering the mouth with a handkerchief when coughing or sneezing were recommended to contain the spread of the disease among people. Despite the measures taken, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) reported that as at 24th July, 2020, a total of 251,893 COVID-19 samples were tested with 38,948 cases confirmed, and 833 deaths (NCDC, 2020). As of 11th September, 2020 the case count was 55,829 confirmed, with 43,810 recovering and 1,075 deaths while as at 28th December 2020 there were almost 85,000 confirmed with 1,264 death rates (NCDC, 2020). Continuing into the next year, there were 178,508 confirmed cases, with 165,982 discharged (93%) and 2,192 deaths as at 9th August, 2021 (NCDC, 2021).

In an effort to control virus from spreading due to lack of a vaccine for its treatment, the government resorted to the use of non-pharmaceutical approaches such as social distancing, wearing of face mask, self-quarantines, border closures, and local lockdowns among others (Bello & Bello, 2021). Aside the health catastrophe caused by the pandemic, the quarantines, social distancing measures, lockdowns and travel ban imposed to curb the spread of the virus did have far-reaching social and economic implications.

From the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus, there were some sectors which were hardest hit. According to Al-Mughairi, Bhaskar and Alazri (2021), the tourism and hospitality industry was one of the hardest hit by the COVID-19 globally. Within the study area, the Cross River State government gave directives on 23rd March, 2020 which ensured that all activities were effectively shut down and a total lockdown of the state's borders was strictly enforced (Uchechukwu, 2020). The state was one of the very last to be cited on the NCDC dashboard in terms of COVID-19 cases and this was not surprising as there were almost no testing centres within the state. Despite the lockdown being eased before the end of the year amid its second wave, so many social and tourism-related activities were indefinitely suspended during the year. Most notable was the 2020 edition of the Calabar Festival. The suspension not only

denied the opportunity to witness the glamour of theatre on display but also denied the city of Calabar and indeed the entire state of the gains which it is known for.

Tourism which is one if not the most important sector in the state suffered immensely during the period. The suspension also brought untold hardship on people within the city (Eseovwe & Diakpomrere, 2021) as the months preceding the annual event are usually used to prepare for it. The suspension not only deprived people the gains of preparing for it but also denied them the gains of the event proper. It is on this basis that this study inquired the following – was there any relationship between the pandemic's impact and the tourism potential within Calabar Municipal? The areas of interest as it concerned the pandemic's impact were the social and financial dimensions.

Statement of the problem

Within the study area, tourism has been the major revenue generating sector since year 2000 till date. This was made so by the existing state government's drive at the turn of the Millennium to harness revenue from the tourism sector with enabling policies and agencies to oversee the implementation of the policies. The drive for the sector to generate revenue was due to the tourism potential of the study area which is still being slowly developed and harnessed. Despite the promising strides which were being made to harness the revenue, an epoch making event towards the end of 2019 changed the dynamics of human endeavour in a manner never seen or imagined before. Due to a pandemic brought about by a virus known as COVID-19, all manner of human activities were forcibly shut down and people were made to stay indoors to avoid contacting the virus due to its mode of transmission and lack of vaccines for its cure. Within the study area, all activities were brought to a halt by the state government on 23rd March, 2020.

The halt included strictly enforced inter-state border closures; intra-state movement quarantines; strict prohibition of organising social activities including church services; enforced shutting down all manner of hospitality services and businesses which is the major business in the study area; enforcement of very limited transportation movements except for essential goods and services such as medicines, water, and food; social distancing (including compulsory wearing of face-mask in case of need for close contact with someone), and; need to wash hands and/or use a hand sanitizer upon entering a new place. The shutting down of all manner of hospitality businesses and services thus put a lot of persons out of daily activities which generated income for them, forcing them to be economically helpless. The restriction on social gatherings also put an enormous strain on persons whose services bordered on social-related events and activities for revenue generation.

The "seeming new normal" even though was eased down towards the middle of 2020 within the study area did not stop people from being sceptical of close contact and large social gatherings due to fear of contacting the virus. Also, the stigmatization which seemingly followed being labelled as one who has been infected made so many people more disillusioned

to go against the restrictions. The uncertainty had ensured that all manner of social and tourism-related activities which usually kept most of the city busy, colourful and attractive annually from July each year were indefinitely suspended. The seeming new normal was even exacerbated toward the end of the year 2020 (on 10th December) when it was announced by the then Minister of Health that within the country the virus had entered its second wave of infecting people. By then, the state which was one of the last to reveal a confirmed case within the country had about 2 or 3 cases. Thus, the enormous influx of visitors and participants in the annual Calabar Festival were missing and even domestic tourism was seeming brought to its feet as the pandemic's scourge ravaged on into year 2021 with no end in sight. Based on the perceived impact of the pandemic on tourism within the study area, this study investigated in retrospect whether there was any relationship between the pandemic's impact and tourism potential. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship between the pandemic's impact in areas of social and financial dimensions on tourism potential within Calabar Municipality.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential in Calabar Municipal LGA of Cross River State.

Research questions

1. To what extent did the social impact of COVID-19 relate with tourism potential?
2. How did the financial impact of COVID-19 relate with tourism potential?

Statement of hypotheses

1. There was no significant relationship between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential
2. Financial impact of COVID-19 had no significant relationship with tourism potential

Literature review

By definition, the concept of social impacts of COVID-19 revolves round issues as they concern proliferation of social activities and influx of tourists, tourists' behaviour (both domestic and foreign), psychological stress of retrenchment and layoffs, social exclusion and inequality (Kiran, 2020; Korinth, 2022). According to Soliku, Kyiire, Mahama and Kubio (2021), there was a sharp decline in social activities in National Parks and "tourism-communities". Tourism-communities according to Cutter, Ash and Emrich (2016) refer to rural communities which play host an endless influx of tourists due to the natural and man-made attraction sites situated within them. The hospitality industry which hitherto hosted guests for accommodation, meetings, workshops and conferences were virtually empty throughout the two phases of the pandemic. There was a drastic decline in social activities such as large-scale marriage and naming ceremonies, community festivals and prayers, and religious services of all kinds. An alarming decline in tourist numbers most especially international tourists was variously reported across tourism destinations (Nairametrics, 2020; Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2021).

Another social impact during the pandemic was tourists' behaviour. Starting with foreign tourists, due to closure of borders, it led to many of them having a change towards tourist destinations. The change in tourist destinations made many tourists to become "domestic tourists" (Korinth, 2022), thus the proliferation of domestic tourism over foreign tourism during the pandemic. The change in tourism destination was also borne out of fear of contacting the virus and the consequences associated with it (Kusumaningrum & Wachyuni, 2020). Tourists' behaviour was also very significant towards the necessity of hotel cleanliness/hygiene being that hotel surfaces most probably were prone to dirt, higher microbial counts and yield potential sources for transmission of the virus. This was because the virus was found to have the potential of being spread when one touched surfaces contaminated by it (WHO, 2020).

In addition, tourists were particularly concerned about face-to-face contact with people as a result of aerosol transmission via central air conditioning being another route of transmission for the virus (Amaechi-Chijioke & Ibeh, 2021). This led to guests mostly patronising hotels which put in a lot of effort towards reassuring them of lodging and accommodation services that gave impetus to sanitation and hygiene. In turn, hotels had to make a lot of effort to purchase resources and engage in practices which depicted their drive towards sanitation and hygiene. Hand sanitizers, gloves, face masks, soaps, wash-hand basins, water and regular office/premises' sanitation and fumigation were always available for guests, and engaged in by operational hospitality business owners during the pandemic (Al-Mughairi, Bhaskar & Alazri, 2021). Awareness of practices such as social distancing, covering one's mouth and nose when sneezing and wearing a face mask were also insisted upon by both guests and business owners.

In an effort to curtail the spread of the virus, governments across the world including the Nigerian government banned mass gathering of people at hotels, tourism sites, religious centres, sport arenas, burials and also, schools were closed. This led to hospitality workers and owners having to face severe disruption of their activities (Obinna, 2021) and this unplanned disruption of activities and restriction threatened the mental and psychological health of hospitality workers and owners by inflicting serious worries on their health, job security, business sustenance (Alonso et al., 2020). The health challenges included anxiety, depression, nervousness, loneliness, mental health challenges, etc. Globally, it was found out that up to 90 million hospitality jobs were laid off before the end of the pandemic's first phase with the greatest decline in staff numbers being those of hotels and restaurants due to 70% of hospitality owners' reporting serious challenges towards payment of salaries and provision of essential logistics (Jones & Comfort, 2020). The layoffs led to poverty and severe hardship.

Lastly, as a result of its rapid transmission, the pandemic brought about the measure of social distancing and in turn, it bred issues of social isolation and exclusion, and social inequalities (Piate, Inyang & Akpan, 2022). As a result of social distancing, due to some persons' fear of contacting the virus and the consequences (including social discrimination attached to it), it

led to people mostly remaining behind closed doors and avoiding social environments and events such as those associated with hospitality industry. As it concerns the pandemic, social isolation refers to keeping distance from all manner of people (family, friends, peers, co-workers, etc), staying away from places such as would bring one into contact with people and avoiding the use of some methods of greetings like handshakes and hugs, which are seen as mediums for the transmission of the virus (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). With the fear of meeting people enshrined in the mind, many persons no longer mingled with others compared to pre-COVID-19 period and for some who perceived themselves as having the resources to prevent contacting the virus, those who did not have were to be avoided at any cost (Kiran, 2020). Foreign tourists were no longer welcome as borders were closed to the point that even intra-country boundaries were totally shut. With this, the tourism/hospitality industry which serves as a melting point for all kinds of people to meet and socialise no longer served its purpose during the pandemic.

Umukoro, Odey and Yta (2020) investigated the effect of pandemic on home-based tourism in the post COVID-19 period among Fast Food Joints (FFJs) in Cross River State. The study's aims included ascertaining the impact of the pandemic on international tourism within the city. The study revealed that some of the responses were that – (i) there was a decrease in foreign tourists and an increase in local/home-based tourism-oriented activities, and; (ii) there was a decrease in acceptance of foreign tourists due to fear of infection, stigmatisation and death. Anunobi, Emeafor and Okpoko (2021) explored changes and challenges faced by hotel service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State. One of the posers enquired by the study was to ascertain the changes encountered in terms of strategies they have to adopt based on each of service delivery, recovery, customer satisfaction, and retention. Some of the respondents' responses were as follows – (i) all prior bookings by customers before the pandemic were shunned and none of the customers involved asked for compensation; (ii) due to perceived fear customers' room occupancy rate per month was yet to reach 20% even 2 months after the pandemic's 2nd phase; (iii) the few customers who patronized them were very demanding in terms of cleanliness and hygiene protocols which made them review their health and safety protocols to decrease the probability of spreading the virus, and; (iv) customers' demands made them pay a lot of detail towards not only purchasing face masks, hand-washing facilities, soaps, and hand sanitizers but also embark on fumigating the hotel surroundings.

Chinwe, Mathew and Bigman (2021) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on social lives/interactions of Nigerians. Included in the study's posers was an enquiry concerning – (i) the effect of the pandemic on people's social lifestyles and activities. The finding revealed the following agreed impacts of the pandemic on social activities – (i) it affected everyday activities such as strolling, site-seeing and visiting landmarks; (ii) it brought about self-isolation which led to frustration and depression; (iii) it brought about mandatory house arrest, and; (iv) it caused social distancing and drastically reduced interaction with others. Obinna (2021) examined the impact of COVID-19 on hospitality workers' risk perception and depression in Nigeria. Human resource managers, supervisors and directors of hospitality

agencies across the country served as the population while purposive sampling technique was used to draw 103 subjects. The study's enquiries involved verifying the experiences of hospitality workers in terms of risk perceptions and depression. The result indicated that almost all the workers in hospitality outfits were found to have risk perceptions, depression and induced stress during the period that the pandemic ravaged people.

Daspan, Bala, Dabo, Rifkatu and Yusuf (2022) ascertained impact of COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable hospitality and tourism e-marketing in Plateau State. The study's inquiries included ascertaining the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable hospitality and tourism e-marketing management. The result revealed that the pandemic did have a significant impact on management of sustainable hospitality and tourism e-marketing. Piate, Inyang and Akpan (2022) assessed the post COVID-19 pandemic experience in Nigeria's hospitality industry. Inclusive in the study's posers was to find out the social implications of the pandemic's experience on the hospitality industry. The result revealed that the social impacts of the pandemic on the industry included restrictions of large social gatherings, sharp decrease of visitors that require hospitality services, under-utilisation of hotel facilities' physical capacity and perception of handshakes/hugs as mode of transmission thus "stay-at-home" by most hospitality workers during the period.

By definition, the financial impact of COVID-19 on tourism and its related businesses is viewed strictly from the standpoint of issues revolving round revenue generation. Such issues include financial losses, income flow, payment of loans, rating on stock exchange markets, financial liquidation (putting one's business up for sales due to bankruptcy), and innovative ways to generate revenue (Ataide & Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2021). According to Nwabuishi and Awritefe (2022), border closures and strict restrictions concerning tourism-related businesses severely affected their revenue generation capabilities. Also strict measures within cities and certain rural areas made it impossible for tourism-related small and medium scale enterprise owners to operate and generate revenue as in pre-COVID-19.

Revenue generated by hotels before pre-Covid-19 in Nigeria expanded at 22.6% compound annual rate of $US1.1 billion in 2018 (Nwabuishi & Awritefe, 2022) and it was expected to grow by an additional 507 million dollars by the end of 2020. However, based on reports from four of the renowned listed hotels on the Nigerian Stock Exchange, a revenue decline of nearly 90% was reported due to the impact of the pandemic (Nairametrics, 2020). Aside the drastic drop in revenue generation of tourism related businesses, the volatility of the Nigerian Stock Exchange Market led to most business owners to pull out their investments and redirect them to the US Treasury Bonds which they considered as a safe haven (Ataide & Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2021). This depicted that the pandemic had a significant negative impact on revenue generation capacity of the country's tourism businesses. Added to that was the uncontrolled rate in which tourism-related businesses were put up for sale due to bankruptcy (Nwabuishi & Awritefe, 2022).

Another indicator of the financial impact of the pandemic on tourism was the extent which the businesses were capable of repaying loans obtained from banks. Ataide and Abomaye-Nimenibo (2021) observed that most tourism-related businesses that obtained loans from banks faced insurmountable barriers towards repaying them back during the pandemic to the point that it weakened some banks' stability and dependability. This led to banks developing the reluctance to give further loans thus making more tourism-related businesses to fold up due to lack of funds to continue operations. In an effort to remain operational during the pandemic period, some businesses innovatively set up digital revenue generation facilities so as to discourage people from handling paper money which served to propagate the virus, yet even at that, most were unsuccessful (Ataide & Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2021). The financial losses due to the pandemic on tourism-related businesses was monumental (Olowookere, Ala & Olanrewaju, 2021) as most of the businesses found it extraordinarily difficult to generate revenue, pay back loans obtained or even explore other innovative ways to generate income which would keep them operational.

Ada, Angioha, Tangban, Abang and Akam (2021) explored the experiences and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic well-being of tourism/hospitality operators in Cross River State. The study's inquiries included examining how the pandemic affected them. The result revealed that 88.4% (341 respondents) indicated that the pandemic affected them in form of income loss. Amaechi-Chijioke and Ibeh (2021) identified the extent of economic recession within the hospitality industry in Abia State during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's inquiries included examining the effect of the recession on hotel operations during the period. The result revealed that 85% and 75% each of the respondents indicated that the recession resulted in low profitability and sharp decline in income flow. Ataide and Abomaye-Nimenibo (2021) studied the economic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian economy. One of the study's hypotheses was concerned with verifying the relationship between the effect of the pandemic and the country's economy in terms of cash flow. The result revealed that the effect of the pandemic significantly correlated with the country's economy in terms of cash flow. This signified that the effect of the pandemic had a profound connection with the extent of cash flow in the country.

An assessment of opinions and attitudes towards economic growth of the tourism sector in Nigeria during COVID-19 was carried out by Inegbedion (2021). One of the study's hypotheses was concerned with assessing the extent which the pandemic significantly influenced circular flow of income within the tourism sector in Nigeria. The result revealed that the pandemic has significantly constrained the perceived circular flow of income within the tourism sector in the country. Tlali and Musi (2022) conducted a thematic analysis of the challenges, coping strategies and lessons learnt based on the effects of COVID-19 on ecotourism in Lesotho. The objectives involved determining the impact of COVID-19 on the activities of the organisation. The responses included the following – (i) there was a sharp decrease in the flow of income due to lack of patronage, and; (ii) revenue generation went down by 93% from what was usually obtainable pre-COVID-19.

An evaluation of the issues, challenges and prospects for sustainable development based on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the hospitality industry in Nigeria was conducted by Umanah and Willie (2022). The study's posers included ascertaining the extent which the pandemic impacted on each of the hospitality industry's flow of income and pay cuts for tourism service providers within the hospitality industry. The result revealed that 95 (73.1%) of the respondents affirmed that the pandemic had a far reaching effect on each of the hospitality industry's flow of income and pay cuts for tourism service providers within the hospitality industry while the rest (35; 29.9%) disagreed to the poser.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey approach. The population consisted of the total number of registered employees of all hospitality businesses within the study area as at the beginning of the year 2020. From the population, a sample of 184 respondents was drawn using proportionate stratified random and purposive sampling techniques. The stratification was based on the category of hospitality businesses that exist in the study area while purposive sampling was applied in the sense that only those who were hospitality staff as at year 2020 were selected as respondents for the study. The data collection instrument was tagged the "Impact of COVID-19 and Tourism Potential Questionnaire" (ICOVID-19 & TPQ). It has sections A and B. Section A was designed to obtain data of the respondents' demographics while Section B elicited responses concerning the sub-independent variables of the social and financial impacts of COVID-19 (6 items each) and the dependent variable of tourism potential (12 items), all with a response rubric of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Educational Foundations and two experts in the Department of Environmental Education who ascertained the degree to which the items on the instrument measured what it is expected to measure. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by conducting a trial test with 30 respondents from communities that were not part of the sample and the obtained data was analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method. The reliability coefficients for social and financial impacts of COVID-19 were .88 and .74, respectively while that for tourism potential was .83. The data collection for the study was done by the researchers in conjunction with 3 research assistants lasted about 8 weeks. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique and tested at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Ho_1: The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential. To test this hypothesis, social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential were compared using PPMC. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: PPMC analysis of social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential (N=184)

Variables	Mean	SD	r-ratio	p-level
Social impact of COVID-19 (X)	16.52	2.81	.161*	.030
Tourism potential (Y)		34.66	7.08	

*Significant at .05 level of significance, Critical r-value = .134.

The result of the analysis in Table 1 revealed that the calculated r-ratio obtained for the relationship between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential was .161 with p-value of .030 is greater than the critical r-value of .134 at the .05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential was rejected since the calculated r-value was greater than the critical r-value. This implies that there is a significant relationship between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential.

Ho_2: The second hypothesis stated that financial impact of COVID-19 has no significant relationship with tourism potential. To test this hypothesis, financial impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential were compared using PPMC. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: PPMC analysis of financial impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential (N=184)

Variables	Mean	SD	r-ratio	p-level
Financial impact of COVID-19 (X)	14.11	1.15	.471*	.000
Tourism potential (Y)		34.66	7.08	

*Significant at .05 level of significance, Critical r-value = .134.

The result of the analysis in Table 2 revealed that the calculated r-ratio obtained for the relationship between financial impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential was .471 with p-value of .000 is greater than the critical r-value of .134 at the .05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that financial impact of COVID-19 has no significant relationship with tourism potential was rejected since the calculated r-value was greater than the critical r-value. This implies that financial impact of COVID-19 has a significant relationship with tourism potential.

Discussion of Findings

The result of hypothesis one revealed that a significant relationship existed between social impact of COVID-19 and tourism potential. This signifies that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This finding is presumed to have been as a result

of the total shutdown of social activities and the social distancing which was enforced and sought for during the pandemic. Social activities such as sitting-out, going for night clubbing, partying, gathering to watch games, sight-seeing, football matches, large-scale marriage and naming ceremonies, community festivals and prayers, and religious services of all kinds, etc, were all seriously prohibited. In addition, fear of each of stigmatization of having contacted the virus and contacting it led to many persons avoiding close contact with other people during the period.

The finding is in consonance with Umukoro et al., (2020) who reported that the social impact of the pandemic caused the following – (i) a decrease in foreign tourists and an increase in local/home-based tourism-oriented activities, and; (ii) a decrease in acceptance of foreign tourists due to fear of infection, stigmatisation and death. Also, Anunobi et al., (2021) in their study observed that socially, the pandemic brought about cancellation/shunning of all prior bookings by customers before the pandemic and none asked for compensation. In addition, the few customers who patronized them were very demanding in terms of cleanliness and hygiene protocols which made them review their health and safety protocols to decrease the probability of spreading the virus. In their own study, Chinwe et al., (2021) found out that the pandemic not only impacted on everyday activities such as strolling, site-seeing and visiting landmarks but also led to social distancing and drastically reduced interaction with others. Lastly, Piate et al., (2022) observed that the social implications of the pandemic's experience on the hospitality industry included restrictions of large social gatherings, sharp decrease of visitors that require hospitality services, under-utilisation of hotel facilities' physical capacity and perception of handshakes/hugs as mode of transmission thus "stay-at-home" by most hospitality workers during the period.

The result of hypothesis two revealed that the financial impact of the pandemic has a significant relationship with tourism potential. This finding indicates that the alternate hypothesis here is upheld while the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding is assumed to have been in this manner due to the restrictions placed on a wide range of activities which lead to revenue generation, circular flow of income and cash exchange among people. The finding agrees with that of Ada et al., (2021) who revealed that the pandemic brought about strenuous financial difficulties on hospitality/tourism operators. Amaechi-Chijioke and Ibeh (2021) also found out that the extent of financial recession on hotel finances due to the pandemic rose up to 85%. Ataide and Abomaye-Nimenibo (2021) reported that the effect of the pandemic had a profound connection with the extent of cash flow across all sectors of the tourism industry. Inegbedion (2021) observed that the pandemic significantly constrained the circular flow of income within the tourism sector. Lastly, Umanah and Willie (2022) reported that the pandemic had a far reaching effect on each of the hospitality industry's flow of income and pay cuts for tourism service providers within the hospitality industry.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Ever since the advent of the democratic era from the 21st century, the tourism potential within the study area has undergone significant transformations as a result of the investments by both the public and private sectors. The aim of the investments is because in recent times, tourism as a service industry has proven to be a viable option for the sustainable development of societies. Through its numerous sectors, it is globally viewed as the major catalyst for growing a sustainable economy in such a manner that it generates employment opportunities as well as other basic social amenities for the consumption of the people. Despite its viability, the advent of the pandemic in 2020 revealed that the tourism sector needs to make certain adjustments to ensure that in the event of another similar impact, the sector would not be hard hit as such. From this study's finding, there was a significant relationship between each of the pandemic's social and financial impact and the tourism potential in the study area.

Based on the finding, it is recommended that the advent of the pandemic should encourage people to seek for diverse ways in which tourism-based social activities can be engaged in or conducted even in the face of another pandemic to avoid a total shutdown of tourism-based social activities. Also, tourism-based businesses should be encouraged to develop and adopt e-transaction activities in order to minimize extent of financial challenges in the event of another pandemic.

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