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Service Innovation and Venture Sustainability of Three-Star Hotels in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated the relationship between service innovation and the economic, social and environmental sustainability of three-star hotels in South-South Nigeria. The research was conducted with a positivist philosophy and correlational survey design, based on the Resource Based View, Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Sustainability Theory. The population consisted of 129 three-star hotels with more than 10 years of operation. A census of the hotels was conducted and 387 respondents were purposively selected from the finance, human resources and operations or facilities departments of the hotels. An expert validated structured five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data. The instrument had an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.791, which is acceptable, and 81.9 per cent of the questionnaires administered were usable. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation at the 0.01 level of significance were used to analyse the data. The results showed that service innovation had significant positive relationships with economic sustainability ($r = 0.233$, $p < 0.01$), social sustainability ($r = 0.235$, $p < 0.01$), and environmental sustainability ($r = 0.297$, $p < 0.01$), respectively, but the relationships were weak, modest, and moderate, respectively. Thus, all three null hypotheses were rejected. The study found that service innovation plays a significant role in the sustainability of hotels, but its impact is still limited. It suggested that service innovation should be coupled with process innovation and marketing innovation, employee training, enabling technologies, and policies and feedback systems oriented towards sustainability and customers to improve the long-term economic, social and environmental performance of hotels.

Keywords: Service Innovation, Venture Sustainability, Economic Sustainability, Social Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability, Hotels, South-South Nigeria

1. Introduction

The services sector of the hospitality industry is an important contributor to economic growth, development of tourism and employment creation, and it has continued to grow on the back of oil and gas activities, conferences and tourism attractions in Nigeria's South-South region of 6 states including Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Rivers and Edo States [1]. While the growth has led to the creation of a number of 3-star hotels geared towards middle-income tourist and corporate clients, many of these facilities continue to suffer operational inefficiencies, weak service and poor returns on investment, downgrading, sustainability issues and other challenges [2].

Hotel service innovation is generally considered one of the key elements in a company's endeavour to be competitive and sustainable in today's business environment, defined as the innovation of new or significantly improved service, delivery systems, and guest interaction processes [3].

Sustainability, on the other hand, is a mix of three interrelated elements—economic sustainability (long-term financial viability and profitability), social sustainability (fair and inclusive treatment of employees and host communities) [4], and environmental sustainability (minimising ecological harm) [5]. The aforementioned challenges pose major problems for the South-South region where power supply is unreliable, waste management is poorly developed, coastal erosion and pollution caused by river activities and activities around oil field sites are posing serious threats, and the demand for touristic services is volatile [6]. Prior studies on service innovations in Nigerian hotels have linked their positive effects to better guest satisfaction and competitive advantage for hotel organisations, but there is little empirical research which would show that such innovations would bring about measurable economic, social, and environmental sustainability effects in this particular and resource-limited region [7].

The existing Nigerian research on innovation and sustainability has largely failed to address both in the hospitality sector, despite it being the focal point of research in other creative industries such as manufacturing and SME; the only few studies that have been conducted have considered the two constructs one by one, or focused on manufacturing and SME contexts in Lagos South-West and South-East [8], which means the South-South segment places its hospitality industry on a comparative disadvantage. This develops a conceptual and contextual gap, because it is not clear whether and how the service innovation specifically works for each of the three sustainability pillars in the context of the specific infrastructure, environmental and other peculiar circumstances in which the hotels from this region operate. This gap is the reason why the present article is important because it examines one of the three dimensions of innovation examined in the larger study (the contribution of service innovation) and tests its relationship with the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental sustainability of three-star hotels in the South-South region of Nigeria [9].

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to:

- a. identify the link between service innovation and economic sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria;
- b. explore the link between service innovation and social sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria and
- c. examine the link between service innovation and environmental sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

1.2 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.01 level of significance and were formulated based on the objectives namely:

Ho1: Service innovation does not have a significant relationship with the economic sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Ho2: Service innovation does not significantly correlate with the social sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Ho3: Service innovation does not have a significant relationship with the environmental sustainability of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

1.3 Service Innovation

Service innovation is the development of new or significantly improved services, experiences or interactions that generate new or greater value for customers and

strengthen the competitive edge of an organisation [10]. In hotels, it can be represented by personal services, digital concierges, mobile check-in and mobile check-out systems, new service packages, and by customer feedback, changing the service offering. In the service-dominant nature of the tourism industry, where customer satisfaction is a key element in establishing brand reputation and customer loyalty, service innovation plays a more critical role in competitiveness [11]. Studies conducted in small hotels in Nigeria show that there is a significant positive relationship between dimensions of service innovativeness and competitiveness for the small hotels [12], whereas a study conducted at four-star hotels in Rivers State of Nigeria revealed that the dimensions of service innovativeness all have positive relationships with customer satisfaction .

Theory suggests that service innovation will have impacts on the three sustainability components. The economic objectives include attracting better-paying, more loyal customers and creating new revenue streams through automation and effective waste reduction [13]. Socially, it can encourage employee engagement and skill building through training for new services – such skills as communication, negotiation, networking, problem-solving, supervision, and management. From an environmental perspective, digital and technology-enabled services (such as electronic menus and paperless check-in) decrease the use of resources. The hypotheses of the present study are based on this particular multi-dimensional linkage.

1.4 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability refers to a hotel's capacity to operate and generate profits in the long term, using resources efficiently and applying them to strengthening infrastructure, technology, and human resources [14]. A key conclusion is that evidence of its existence is demonstrated through revenue stability, cost-efficient operations, prudent use of its resources and tolerance for shocks like inflation and demand volatility .Special issues that demand consideration for the economic sustainability of hotels are efficient resource use and steady income in the South-South where energy and infrastructure costs are high .

1.5 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is related to how well the hotel business supports and promotes the wellbeing of employees, the surrounding community, and society at large [15] by employing good pay practices, training and promoting an inclusive workforce, purchasing locally sourced products and engaging with the community. It highlights the human and relational aspects of sustainability: quality of jobs and wellbeing of staff, and quality of community and cultural integration, which are the most prominent indicators in the hospitality domain [16]. Socially sustainable practices in the South-South region, where people may be impacted by extractive industries and inequalities, play a role in legitimacy and goodwill [17].

1.6 Environmental Sustainability

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development [18] and Okorigba et al., environmental sustainability refers to the reduction of adverse ecological effects like energy saving, water saving, minimisation of waste, and pollution control that is pursued by a hotel. Environmental sustainability is a pressing issue, especially in the environment-sensitive South-South region, particularly in areas directly affected by oil spills, coastal erosion, and sensitive environmental ecosystems. Practical solutions are usually energy-efficient technologies, waste sorting and recycling, eco-friendly materials and formal environmental-management systems .

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The study is based on three theories which are complementary. According to the Resource-Based View of the firm [19], the source of a company's sustainable competitive advantage is internal resources that are valuable, rare, and hard to imitate, such as

capability in service innovation. Dynamic Capabilities Theory [20] builds on this static approach by adding the capability to sense opportunities for guests' experiences, as well as the ability to seize opportunities by offering new hotel services, and reconfigure operations to persist in the face of turbulent environments. Sustainability Theory is based on the so-called Triple Bottom Line (TBL) [21] and the Brundtland Commission's understanding of sustainable development, which sees the aforementioned dimensions of economic, social and environmental performance as interdependent and innovation – including service innovation – expected to deliver all three at the same time. Combined, these theories provide a justification for regarding service innovation as a strategic resource that is deployable and should be noticeable in improvements to economic, social and environmental sustainability outcomes.

1.8 Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

1.8.1 *Service Innovation and Economic Sustainability*

From both empirical and conceptual standpoints, service innovation positively contributes to economic sustainability, by providing customer satisfaction, which also helps to increase operational efficiency and income generation. Differentiated services, alongside the potential for cost savings through automated service systems and reduced waste through the use of online booking systems or mobile concierge deserve special mention—these features can help to spread premium prices and increase customer loyalty. However, in some contexts such as local manufacturing or generic SME settings, there is also empirical validation of the link between innovation and sustainability in Nigeria, which needs to be further tested given the context of hotels operating under the constraints of South-South infrastructure in which this study is set [22]. This yields Ho1.

1.8.2 *Service Innovation and Social Sustainability*

Service innovations can involve creating and working in a positive environment, inspiring and engaging employees, and can include cultural integration and community goodwill. Theorising service innovations that demand staff training, as well as co-creation of guest service offerings with community participation, leads to an increase in social cohesion and stakeholder trust. Similarly, innovativeness can contribute to SME sustainability from social, economic and environmental perspectives, although there is limited research evidence supporting SMEs specifically in Nigeria's hotel context [23]. This underpins Ho2.

1.8.3 *Service Innovation and Environmental Sustainability*

New service innovations such as digital check-in, smart-room systems, and electronic communications are able to minimise paper usage and energy consumption, while making service improvement an environmental endeavour. This linkage can also be seen in the use of green cleaning products, sustainable purchasing practices and waste-reduction programmes within the framework of the service design. In view of the sensitivity of this South-South environment, especially the oil-producing regions where pollution and mismanagement of natural resources are common, this study's results provide direct empirical evidence of how much service innovation contributes to the sustainability of environmental conditions in the hotels of this region, which led to the testing of Ho3.

1.9 Gap in Literature

The idea of leveraging innovation for sustainability has been the subject of increased academic research, but previous studies on the innovation-sustainability nexus in Nigeria have considered innovation and sustainability separately and as clustered "innovation strategy" rather than discussing specific types of innovations such as service innovations [24]. Only a handful of sustainability studies have disaggregated sustainability into its economic, social and environmental aspects, in the sectors that provide hospitality services to travellers, particularly as it relates to the South-South

region, which has been more under-researched than, for example, the Lagos or South-West regions in the existing literature given its competing pulls from oil-based economies, infrastructural weaknesses and ecological fragilities. The aim of this study is to fill this vacuum by empirically separating the service innovation effects on each of the three sustainability elements in the South-South among three-star hotels [25].

2. Materials and Methods

The study was set in a positivist research paradigm using a correlational survey design, which is suitable for studying and quantifying the relationship between service innovation and the three dimensions of sustainability without manipulating the variables. The population included 129 three-star hotels with a ten-year operating history, all of which were identified from the Nigeria Tourism Development Authority register of 798 registered three-star hotels in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States and had operated in the zone for over 10 years. All the hotels were included in a census, and within each hotel, three respondents were purposively selected to cover function-based expertise with regard to the dimensions of sustainability being explored in this study: the Finance Manager, Accountant, or the Executive Financial Officer (CFO) for economic sustainability; the Human Resource, or Employee Relations Manager for social sustainability; and the Operations, Facility, or Executive Environmental and Safety Officers (EESOs) for environmental sustainability. This resulted in the creation of 387 targets (3 x 129).

The information and data were gathered through a structured questionnaire which contained items on three sustainability dimensions and service innovation using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The face and content validation was conducted by three experts who have experience in the field of hospitality management and research methodology. To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated with a pilot sample of 30 respondents from hotels outside the study area, resulting in an overall coefficient of 0.791; the service innovation subscale also met the 0.70 reliability and 0.30 item-total correlation cut-off requirements, achieving a corrected item-total correlation of 0.490. Of the 387 questionnaires distributed, 87.1% were returned, and 317 (81.9%) were usable for analysis. Descriptive statistics (means and SD) and Pearson product-moment correlation results were used to test the three hypotheses and establish the levels ($p \leq 0.01$) of the relationships. SPSS version 26 was used in the data analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics on Service Innovation

Table 1 summarises respondents' perceptions of service innovation practices in their hotels (N = 317). All five item means fell below the scale midpoint of 3.00, indicating that respondents generally perceived service innovation as moderately low across the sampled hotels. The item on customer feedback informing service improvement recorded the highest mean (2.73), while the item on technology improving service quality and delivery recorded the lowest (2.21).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Service Innovation (N = 317)

Item	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our hotel regularly introduces new services to meet changing guest needs.	1	5	2.43	1.214
The hotel frequently upgrades existing services to enhance guest satisfaction.	1	5	2.55	1.487
Customer feedback is often used to develop or	1	5	2.73	1.209

improve service offerings.

Technology has improved the quality and delivery of our hotel services.	1	5	2.21	1.063
Service innovation contributes to the hotel's competitive advantage.	1	5	2.38	1.305

Source: Survey Data (2026) via SPSS Output Version 26

3.2 Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between service innovation and economic sustainability.

Table 2. Correlation between Service Innovation and Economic Sustainability

		Service Innovation	Economic Sustainability
Service Innovation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.233**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317
Economic Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	0.233**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Survey Data (2026)

As shown in Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient between service innovation and economic sustainability was $r = 0.233$ ($p < 0.001$), which is significant at the 0.01 level. The null hypothesis (Ho1) was therefore rejected: service innovation has a statistically significant, positive, but weak relationship with economic sustainability, indicating that hotels that innovate services also tend to record modest gains in revenue stability, cost management, and profitability.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between service innovation and social sustainability.

Table 3. Correlation between Service Innovation and Social Sustainability

		Service Innovation	Social Sustainability
Service Innovation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.235**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317
Social Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	0.235**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Survey Data (2026)

Table 3 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.235$ ($p < 0.001$) between service innovation and social sustainability, significant at the 0.01 level. Ho2 was rejected: hotels that innovate their services also tend to perform somewhat better on employee welfare, training, and community-engagement indicators, though the relationship remains weak.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between service innovation and environmental sustainability.

Table 4. Correlation between Service Innovation and Environmental Sustainability

		Service Innovation	Environmental Sustainability
Service Innovation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.297**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317
Environmental Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	0.297**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Survey Data (2026)

Table 4 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.297$ ($p < 0.001$) between service innovation and environmental sustainability, the strongest of the three relationships tested and significant at the 0.01 level. Ho3 was rejected: hotels that innovate services, particularly through technology-enabled delivery, also tend to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices.

Table 5. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hyp.	Relationship Tested	r	Sig.	Decision
Ho1	Service Innovation and Economic Sustainability	0.233	.000	Rejected; significant, weak, positive
Ho2	Service Innovation and Social Sustainability	0.235	.000	Rejected; significant, weak, positive
Ho3	Service Innovation and Environmental Sustainability	0.297	.000	Rejected; significant, moderate, positive

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

4. Discussion

4.1 Service Innovation and Economic Sustainability

There is a weak but significant correlation between service innovation and economic sustainability ($r = 0.233$), which implies that the new services, the improvement of services, the use of a new concept (of the customers), and the use of a service-enabling technology do contribute to the financial stability of hotels, but not to the same extent. This aligns with Onyemaobi et al. [26] who reported a higher correlation value ($r = 0.627$) between innovation strategy and SME economic outcomes in manufacturing, where the economic returns of innovation to the outcome are expected to be faster than those in the service sector where economic returns may occur gradually due to customer experiences and loyalty building. It must also be noted that the small effect size could be because many of the service innovations that were observed were very incremental (for example, changes in hotel menus or amenities) as compared to radical service innovations and because infrastructural factors like unreliable power can limit the cost savings to be realized from technology-based innovative services [27]. This is broadly in line with the Schumpeterian modelling of innovation as a source of economic value, but adds the warning that the force of that value is dependent on the circumstances.

Service Innovation and Social Sustainability

Service innovation has a modest ($r = 0.235$) though positive association with social sustainability and suggests that innovative aspects of service work have some effects

beyond guest satisfaction on employee well-being, training and community involvement. This is consistent with the recent results of Sodeinde et al. who established that innovativeness is important for the sustainability of SMEs across social, economic and environmental perspectives. Implementing new services in the hotel field can be accompanied by training and cross-functionality of the employees, and thus enterprises can benefit in strengthening their development programmes, even if they do not specifically aim at social sustainability. It would seem, however, that unless the social dimensions of service innovation are deliberately coupled with human-resource and community-engagement policies, the returns of social gain are unlikely to be significant, as the Triple Bottom Line places special stress on intentional and integrated efforts to achieve social value.

4.2 Service Innovation and Environmental Sustainability

Naturally, the considerable demand for services has motivated constant innovation, largely driven by specific environmental and sustainability concerns.

Although the environmental sustainability relationship was the strongest of the three relationships, a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.297$) was found between service innovation and environmental sustainability, which indicates that the technology used to deliver services, such as digital check-in, online bookings and paperless guest communication, has a more tangible connection to environmental outcomes than economic or social ones. This is similar to the broader argument that digitalisation directly takes the place of service-oriented processes that are energy and paper-intensive. Despite this, the moderate correlation suggests that environmental sustainability through service innovation does not stem exclusively from innovation, but also includes environmental training, monitoring and management.

4.3 Synthesis

Service innovation had statistically significant positive relationships across all three dimensions tested; however, in all cases the relationships were weak to moderate ($r = 0.233$ to 0.297) and not strong. Based on this pattern, service innovation can be seen as an important, but incomplete, driver of sustainability by South-South Nigerian hotels; it can push the needle on financial performance, social responsibility and environmentally relevant practice, but is unlikely without other factors to make for significant sustainability improvements. The relatively high correlation with environmental sustainability indicates that the ecological advantages of digital and technology-driven service delivery are likely to be the easiest to observe, with economic and social advantages possibly taking longer to materialise and requiring supporting strategic investments.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the economic, social and environmental sustainability of three-star-rated hotels in South-South Nigeria and their relationship with service innovation. All three null hypotheses were rejected, as service innovation was significantly and positively correlated with economic sustainability (weak), social sustainability (weak) and environmental sustainability (moderate). Service innovation (the introduction and upgrading of services, the incorporation of customer feedback, the deployment of service-enabling technology) is a genuine but limited stimulus of the venture sustainability of the hotels in the region, whose benefits continue to be clearly discernible in the environmental dimension at the moment.

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