Strategies for Sustainability in Post-COVID-19 Era: Insights from Selected Hotels.

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Abstract

The post-COVID-19 era has transformed the hospitality industry, emphasising the need for resilience, sustainability, and innovation. This study analyses the factors influencing hotel sales and the strategies employed to maintain operations in the post-pandemic period. Using a mixed-methods approach, structured interviews were conducted with nine participants who were purposively sampled from hotels across three different star ratings. Demographic data were analysed with Microsoft Excel Professional Plus 2019, while the interview responses were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that the pandemic had a significant impact on employment, customer patronage, and sales performance. Many hotel staff displaced during the pandemic still face limited job options, while customer patronage, though improving, remains below pre-pandemic levels. Sales performance is moderate, showing partial recovery but no growth. To address these issues, the study recommends that hotel managers diversify revenue streams, strengthen their digital presence, adopt technological innovations, and implement sustainable practices. These strategies are essential for building resilience, maintaining competitiveness, and ensuring long-term sustainability in the evolving hospitality sector.

Keywords Hospitality industry, post-COVID-19 pandemic, sales performance, sustainability, thematic analysis

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most disruptive global crises of the 21st century, causing significant economic, social, and environmental impacts across various industries. One of the hardest-hit sectors is the hospitality industry, a service-based sector that relies heavily on human interaction, mobility, and international connectivity. (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). The pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in hospitality systems, compelling hotels and restaurants worldwide to confront reduced demand, operational limitations, and challenges in maintaining business continuity (UNWTO, 2020; IMF, 2020). For countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, these disruptions have been especially severe due to the region's reliance on tourism and limited infrastructure to mitigate crises.

Before the pandemic, Ghana's hospitality sector, especially hotels and restaurants, experienced steady growth driven by increasing urbanisation, population growth, and rising disposable incomes (Dayour et al., 2021). However, COVID-19 reversed this trend, resulting in widespread job losses, revenue declines, and decreased customer demand (Hervie et al., 2022; Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). Evidence indicates that Ghanaian hotel restaurants had to downsize their workforce, limit services, and adapt to government-mandated closures and travel bans. The drop in sales has made it essential for businesses to reassess their operational strategies to remain sustainable in the post-pandemic market.

Scholars have proposed various recovery and sustainability strategies in response to the crisis. These include diversifying revenue streams through services such as catering, takeout, and event planning (Kiti, 2024); expanding digital presence and adopting online ordering systems (Yeh, 2021); and implementing flexible staffing arrangements to balance cost efficiency with operational agility (Antwi et al., 2025). Furthermore, Hoang et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of strategic management practices, such as leveraging technology, prioritising customer safety, and strengthening stakeholder relationships, as key elements of resilience in the hospitality sector. Collectively, these insights highlight an urgent need for hotels not only to recover but also to incorporate sustainability and adaptability into their business models.

Despite these recommendations, empirical studies on how hotels in Ghana, particularly in secondary cities such as Takoradi, are responding to the post-COVID-19 environment remain limited. Much of the existing literature (Nhamo et al., 2020; Chua et al., 2020; Efthimiou, 2025) has focused on immediate crisis responses rather than long-term resilience and sustainability strategies. Considering the importance of the hospitality industry to Ghana's economy, there is

a crucial need to explore practical approaches that can ensure business relevance, competitiveness, and sustainability in a changing post-pandemic context.

Accordingly, this study investigates strategies for sustainability in the post-COVID-19 era, drawing insights from selected hotels in Takoradi. Specifically, it examines the factors influencing sales performance in the hospitality sector and assesses the recovery strategies implemented by hotels to foster resilience and adaptability. By focusing on a key regional hub, this study contributes to broader debates on how emerging-economy hospitality businesses can reimagine their operations to thrive in a post-pandemic world.

2. Literature Review

The hospitality industry is vulnerable to external shocks, including pandemics, economic downturns, and natural disasters. COVID-19, in particular, has garnered significant scholarly attention due to its unprecedented disruption of hospitality services globally (Baum & Hai, 2020; Owusu et al., 2023). Research indicates that the pandemic not only reduced revenues but also reshaped customer expectations, forcing businesses to innovate in areas such as safety protocols, service delivery, and technological adoption (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Chi et al., 2022). In the Ghanaian context, several studies have examined the immediate impact of the pandemic on the hospitality industry. Allotey (2022) found that hotels in Accra and Kumasi reported significant revenue losses, layoffs, and difficulties in covering operational costs. Similarly, Barnes (2024) highlighted how small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises relied on ad hoc strategies such as downsizing, menu reductions, and temporary closures to survive the crisis. Afranie-Adjei (2024) further observed that hotels which adopted digital platforms for marketing and food delivery showed comparatively higher resilience than those dependent on traditional in-person operations.

Globally, scholars have suggested that resilience in hospitality requires not only short-term crisis management but also the integration of sustainability principles into core business strategies. For instance, Bell et al. (2019), Guo et al. (2022), and Fairlie et al. (2022) argue that businesses that diversify income streams, invest in staff training, and adopt environmentally sustainable practices are better positioned to withstand future crises. Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) has emphasised the importance of hygiene, customer trust, and food safety protocols, which have since become integral to customer decision-making [Gupta & Sahu, (2021); Hong, et al., (2021); Kumar, et al., (2024)], in the hospitality industry. While these studies offer valuable insights, a lack of empirical research persists, particularly in smaller urban centres in Ghana, where hotels face unique operational challenges, such as

limited resources, smaller customer bases, and reduced exposure to international tourism. Takoradi, as a significant oil and port city, provides a distinctive case for understanding how regional hotels manage post-COVID-19 realities. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining the strategies used by selected hotels in Takoradi to sustain sales and stay relevant in the business.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research design provides a framework for connecting conceptual issues with empirical evidence by outlining the procedures for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Additionally, a case study approach was utilised to enable an in-depth exploration of the strategies employed by hotels in Takoradi.

3.2 Methodological Justification

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, guided by a pragmatic epistemological stance that emphasises flexibility (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). Combining quantitative and qualitative data captured both the breadth and depth of the pandemic's impact on hotel operations and managers' experiences. Abductive reasoning was used, alternating between empirical findings and theoretical concepts to explain resilience and sustainability practices. Structured interviews and quantitative demographic data provided valuable insights and enabled comparisons across different types of hotels.

3.3 Population and Sample Characteristics

The target population comprised human resource managers, front office managers, and executive chefs from selected hotels. Nine (9) participants were purposively selected from three hotels with different star ratings. This sampling approach ensured diversity in viewpoints, reflecting the differences among hotel categories while allowing for sufficient depth in case study analysis.

3.4 Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling method was used to identify respondents who were readily available and willing to participate. This approach allowed researchers to directly target key informants involved in operational and managerial decisions within the hotels. Specifically, participants were chosen from a 4-star hotel, a 2-star hotel, and a Lodge, all located in Takoradi, Ghana.

Demographic data were analysed quantitatively, while responses from the interviews were examined qualitatively.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a formal protocol. A letter of introduction, signed by the Head of the Hospitality Management Department at Takoradi Technical University, was submitted to the management of the selected hotels to seek permission for participation. Once approved, interview sessions were arranged with the selected participants at mutually convenient dates and times. This approach ensured cooperation and reduced disruptions to hotel operations.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

Data were gathered through a structured interview guide. Interviews were carried out with human resource managers, front office managers, and executive chefs. A structured interview involves asking a standardised set of predetermined questions in a fixed order, ensuring consistency across respondents while allowing for response comparison (Naz et al., 2022). This method enabled the collection of both factual information (e.g., demographics, practices) and more detailed insights into managerial perceptions and recovery strategies for the hotels.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel Professional Plus (2019 version). Quantitative data (e.g., demographic characteristics) were summarised using descriptive statistics. At the same time, qualitative responses from interviews were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and insights related to sales, employment, marketing, and sustainability practices. The mixed-methods integration enabled a richer interpretation of the findings, aligning statistical trends with explanatory narratives.

4. **Results**

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	5	55.60%
	Female	4	44.40%
Position	Human Resource Manager	3	33.30%
	Front Office Manager	3	33.30%
	Executive Chef	3	33.30%
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	6	66.70%
	Diploma	2	22.20%
	Master's Degree	1	11.10%
Hotel Star Rating	4-Star	3	33.30%
	1-Star	3	33.30%
	Budget hotel	3	33.30%
Years of Experience	Mean = 8.7 years, SD = 3.1		

Source: Authors' Construct, 2025

The demographic characteristics of the nine participants are summarised in Table 1. In terms of gender distribution, the sample consisted of five males (55.6%) and four females (44.4%). Regarding job roles, the sample was evenly distributed across key managerial positions: three human resource managers (33.3%), three front office managers (33.3%), and three executive chefs (33.3%). In terms of educational background, most participants (n = 6; 66.7%) held a bachelor's degree, two (22.2%) had a diploma, and one (11.1%) possessed a master's degree. Participants were equally selected from three hotels of different star ratings: 33.3% from a 4-star hotel (an upscale hotel), 33.3% from a 1-star hotel, and 33.3% from a guest house representing budget hotels. The average years of work experience among participants was 8.7 years, with a standard deviation of 3.1, indicating moderate variability in professional tenure. Overall, the sample reflects a diverse cross-section of managerial perspectives across various hotel categories in Takoradi, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the findings.

4.1 Enhancing Online Presence and Digital Transformation

Human resource managers reported that hotels took deliberate steps to enhance their online presence and attract new customers. These included partnerships with booking platforms, increased activity on social media through dedicated teams, and the adoption of emerging

technologies such as ChatGPT and search engine optimisation (SEO) strategies. These initiatives align with recommendations for businesses to utilise digital tools to secure a competitive edge (Daradkeh et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2025). Hotels also embraced digital transformation to boost their sustainability efforts by implementing digital check-in/check-out systems, electronic communication tools, and guest information portals. These measures reduced paper usage while streamlining operations, in line with broader industry trends (Bilgihan & Ricci, 2024).

4.2 Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

Respondents emphasised the importance of working with external partners as a key part of their business revival strategy. Hotels collaborated with travel bloggers, the Ghana Tourism Authority, travel agencies, and artists to increase visibility and draw in customers. Such strategic alliances are seen as vital recovery measures in the post-pandemic hospitality industry (Fu et al., 2024; Huang & Liu, 2022; Sun et al., 2025).

4.3 Employee Layoffs and Re-Employment

The pandemic forced some hotels to make redundancies. Managers emphasised transparent communication with staff, maintained alumni networks to assist re-employment opportunities, and rehired high-performing former employees. This strategy aligns with existing HR policies that differentiate between eligible and ineligible employees for rehire (Joseph, 2024). However, some hotels reported avoiding redundancies altogether. Employee testimonies indicated that post-pandemic recovery efforts involved rehiring, reflecting broader global employment trends during the COVID-19 pandemic (Handwerker et al., 2020; Danso et al., 2020).

4.4 Marketing and Promotional Activities

Hotels adopted multi-channel marketing strategies to attract customers after the pandemic. Key tactics included maintaining an active presence across social media platforms (Danso et al., 2020), offering special discounts on holidays and local celebrations, sponsoring events, and providing exclusive upgrades for loyal customers. These tactics align with established post-pandemic marketing strategies that emphasise digital advertising, targeted promotions, and tailored customer experiences (Pascual-Fraile et al., 2025; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024).

4.5 Pricing Strategies

In response to changing demand, hotels adjusted their pricing strategies to encourage bookings and increase occupancy rates. These included group and conference packages, discounted pool access, flexible payment options, early-bird discounts, and incentives for repeat guests. In line with Morton (2022) and Hinson et al. (2024), these methods reflect broader industry trends in

adaptive pricing, balancing lower rates to attract guests while maintaining long-term profitability.

4.6 Health, Safety, and Customer Confidence

Hotels reported adopting enhanced health and safety measures to rebuild customer trust, including strengthened cleaning protocols, maintaining an on-site 24-hour pharmacy, and ensuring quick access to nearby hospitals. Guests confirmed satisfaction with cleanliness and hygiene standards. These responses align well with Odwori (2022), who reported that guest health safety measures, adaptability, leadership, and the use of technology to minimise human-to-human interactions are key learning areas from the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, the findings reinforce industry advice that hygiene should remain central to post-pandemic recovery (Hao et al., 2020; Pillai et al., 2021).

4.7 Sustainability and Kitchen Operations

Executive chefs noted that the pandemic had a significant impact on sustainability practices in hotel kitchens. Hotels are prioritising reducing food waste through portion control, creative reuse of leftovers, and donations to food banks, as well as sourcing sustainably from local farmers. Innovations include adding plant-based options to menus and hosting educational workshops for staff and guests. These initiatives align with sustainable hospitality guidelines (Zwanka & Buff, 2021; Farrell, 2023).

4.8 Customer Engagement and Loyalty

Front office managers emphasised personalised engagement with corporate clients and regular guests through visits, calls, personalised emails, and loyalty rewards. These practices strengthen customer relationships and promote repeat bookings, aligning with literature that highlights personalisation as a key post-pandemic strategy (Villao, 2021; WHO, 2023). Guests generally gave positive feedback on the strategies introduced, although some recommended stricter health and safety measures and loyalty programmes for regular clients. Managers reported measurable success through increased bookings, revenue growth, and high occupancy rates, which correspond with key performance indicators (Remy, and Kruesi, 2023; Nduta, 2021; Thiel, 2021).

4.9 Continuous Strategic Adaptation

Hotels are committed to continually refining their revival strategies, especially by maintaining strong digital visibility and enhancing service offerings. The use of technology-driven solutions, as emphasised by Danso et al. (2020), and proactive crisis management are regarded

as vital for long-term resilience, in line with hospitality recovery frameworks (Kariru & Ndungu, 2022; Qiong, 2022; Ghaderi et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study examined the post-COVID-19 recovery of hotels and restaurants in Takoradi, focusing on employment practices, customer patronage, and marketing strategies. The findings show that, although the hospitality sector has demonstrated resilience by maintaining operations and attracting customers, the pace of recovery remains slow. While hotels and restaurants have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, they have adopted strategies to sustain their market presence and remain competitive.

A key strength observed was the re-engagement of former staff, which reduced recruitment costs and facilitated faster recovery by utilising existing skills and institutional knowledge. However, workforce reduction continues to be a challenge for some establishments, reflecting the broader labour market contraction in the hospitality industry. On the demand side, customer patronage is steadily improving, yet it remains inconsistent, emphasising the need for innovative service delivery and stronger loyalty programmes.

The study also highlights the importance of effective marketing strategies and health protocols in supporting recovery. Hotels and restaurants that adopted multi-channel marketing approaches, improved hygiene practices, and integrated sustainable operations were better placed to restore customer confidence. These measures not only address immediate post-pandemic challenges but also provide pathways to long-term resilience.

In conclusion, the post-COVID-19 era has had a significant impact on sales, labour dynamics, and operational practices within the hospitality industry. To ensure a sustained recovery, managers must continue investing in staff development, customer engagement, and digital innovation, while incorporating sustainability principles into their operations. Future research should explore long-term changes in consumer behaviour in the Ghanaian hospitality sector and assess how these establishments can adapt to evolving global industry standards.

6. Practical Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the resilience and competitiveness of hotels in the post-COVID-19 era.

6.1 Implement Sustainability Initiatives

Hotels should adopt eco-friendly practices, including the use of energy-efficient systems, waste reduction, and water conservation. These actions not only cut operational costs but also attract environmentally conscious travellers, thereby strengthening the company's market position.

6.2 Diversify Revenue Streams

Establishments should explore alternative revenue streams, such as hosting social and corporate events, offering co-working spaces, and collaborating with local businesses to create package deals. Diversification will help protect hotels from fluctuations in guest patronage.

6.3 Invest in Technology

Digital innovations, such as contactless check-in/check-out, mobile key access, and AI-powered guest services, should be prioritised to improve the customer experience, reduce labour costs, and meet changing traveller expectations.

6.4 Enhance Financial Efficiency

Sales and operations managers should diligently monitor expenses, renegotiate supplier agreements, and adopt cost-saving technologies to optimise their operations. Investing in energy-efficient solutions can significantly reduce overhead costs while improving sustainability performance.

6.5 Strengthen Local Market Engagement

Hotels should prioritise attracting domestic customers through customised marketing campaigns, loyalty schemes, and special offers. Building strong relationships with local guests can create a more stable revenue stream, especially during periods of reduced international travel.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on hotels within a single geographic area, which may restrict the broader relevance of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces potential bias. Future research should therefore use larger, more diverse samples across multiple regions to enhance external validity. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how hotel recovery strategies develop. Cross-country comparative research would further help distinguish between context-specific practices and universal strategies for resilience and sustainability within the hospitality sector.

Acknowledgements

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