

Strategic Agility and Competitive Advantage of Hotel Business in Rivers State

Ijeoma-Charlse Ruth Waale¹ and B. Chima Onuoha²

¹Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

²Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

Abstract: *The dynamic and competitive nature of the hospitality industry in Rivers State demands that hotels continually adapt and innovate to stand out and succeed. This study examines the relationships between strategic agility dimensions (market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability), awards and accolades, and market share growth in the context of ten 4-star hotels in Rivers State. Using a quantitative research design, data was collected through structured questionnaires from supervisors and above within the hotels. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed to analyze the data and test hypotheses. The findings consistently revealed significant relationships between strategic agility dimensions, awards and accolades, and market share growth. The results demonstrate that higher levels of market sensing are associated with an increased likelihood of hotels receiving awards and accolades, as well as greater market share growth. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in achieving both industry recognition and market share expansion. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the pivotal role of strategic agility in driving performance outcomes within Rivers State's hotel industry. The study's implications extend to hotel management strategies that prioritize market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability to excel in guest satisfaction, attain industry recognition, and achieve sustainable growth.*

Keywords: *Strategic agility, Awards and accolades, Market share growth, Hospitality industry, Rivers State, Hotel management.*

Introduction

In the heart of Nigeria, Rivers State has emerged as a captivating blend of culture, commerce, and natural beauty. With its thriving economy and increasing appeal to both business and leisure travelers, the hotel industry in Rivers State has taken center stage. Amidst the bustling competition and dynamic market conditions, the concept of strategic agility has risen as a beacon of hope for hotels seeking to secure a significant competitive advantage (Aldehayyat & Al Khattab, 2012). The hospitality landscape has evolved dramatically in recent years, driven by technological advancements, changing guest preferences, and the rapid globalization of travel. In this fast-paced environment, adaptation and innovation are no longer mere options; they are prerequisites for survival (Lashley & Morrison, 2000).

Strategic agility is the compass that guides businesses through the volatile currents of change (Fuchs, Brem & Zogaj, 2018). In the context of the hotel industry, it is the ability to swiftly and adeptly adjust strategies and operations in response to shifts in the market, technology, and customer preferences. It embodies an organization's resilience, flexibility, and proactive readiness to embrace new opportunities and tackle emerging challenges.

Competitive advantage on the other hand is the treasure every hotel seeks, the key differentiator that propels a business ahead of its rivals. It's the unique blend of qualities that not only attract guests but also keep them coming back (Yang & Tse, 2017). In the context of Rivers State's hotel industry, this advantage might be rooted in offering unparalleled cultural experiences, providing exceptional personalized services, or employing sustainable practices that align with the ethos of the region.

As the tourism sector grows and diversifies in Rivers State, hotels find themselves presented with both opportunities and obstacles. New entrants are continuously vying for attention, and the expectations of travelers are evolving in unprecedented ways. To stand out amidst this competition and deliver exceptional guest experiences, hotels must embrace strategic agility as a fundamental strategy.

Statement of the problem

The hotel industry in Rivers State, has witnessed a remarkable surge in growth, spurred by the region's economic vitality and burgeoning tourism appeal. However, this growth has brought with it a host of intricate challenges that demand strategic attention. As hotels strive to capture their share of the market and deliver exceptional guest experiences, several pressing problems have emerged, highlighting the need for strategic agility and innovative solutions.

Intense Competition: The influx of new hotels and accommodations has intensified the competition within Rivers State's hospitality sector. Established hotels and newcomers alike vie for the attention of travelers, compelling industry players to adopt strategies that differentiate them from the crowd (Sirakaya-Turk & Lassar, 2005).

Evolving Guest Preferences: In an era of hyper-connectivity and global awareness, traveler preferences are rapidly evolving. Guests seek personalized experiences that reflect local culture, sustainability, and technological convenience. Adapting to these changing preferences requires hotels to demonstrate agility in tailoring their services.

Technological Disruption: The digital era has ushered in a new wave of technological advancements that have transformed how guests interact with hotels. Online booking platforms, mobile apps, and smart room technologies have become integral to the guest experience (Wang, Li & Li, 2017). The challenge lies in integrating these technologies seamlessly while maintaining the human touch that defines hospitality.

Sustainability Imperatives: As environmental consciousness grows, travelers increasingly demand sustainable practices from the establishments they patronize. Hotels face the task of not only implementing eco-friendly initiatives but also effectively communicating these efforts to attract environmentally-conscious guests.

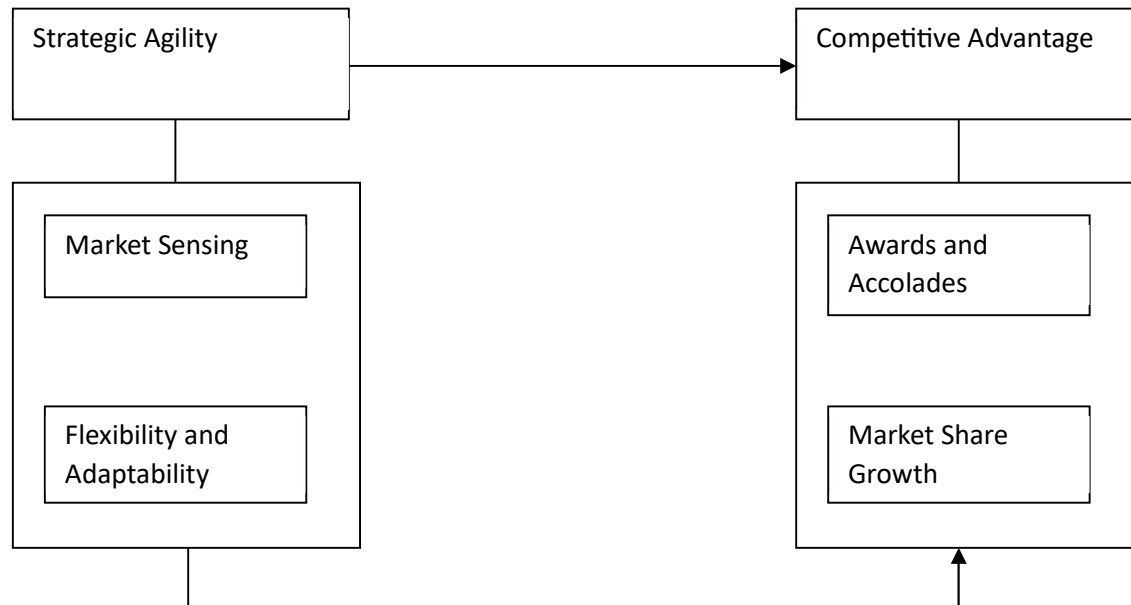
Labor and Talent Management: The hotel industry heavily relies on a skilled workforce to deliver exceptional service. However, recruiting, training, and retaining skilled staff remains a persistent challenge. The evolving needs of modern travelers necessitate a workforce that is not only competent but also adaptable and capable of embracing technological advancements.

Infrastructure and Connectivity: While Rivers State's tourism potential is immense, it is not devoid of infrastructural challenges. Inconsistent power supply, inadequate road networks, and limited internet connectivity can impact the guest experience and hinder operational efficiency.

Research Gap: While the challenges facing the hotel industry in Rivers State are evident, there is a gap in understanding how strategic agility can serve as a panacea for these issues. Existing research often focuses

on broader hospitality trends and lacks a localized perspective that delves into the specific challenges and potential solutions within Rivers State.

In light of these challenges, this study aims to explore the pivotal role of strategic agility as a dynamic approach that can enable hotels in Rivers State to effectively address these issues and secure a competitive advantage. By understanding how strategic agility can drive innovation, foster adaptability, and enhance guest experiences, hotels can navigate the complex terrain of the industry and emerge as leaders in this evolving landscape.



Objectives of the study

- i. To investigate the extent to which market sensing relate with awards and accolades
- ii. To investigate the extent to which market sensing relate with market share growth
- iii. To investigate the extent to which flexibility and adaptability relate with awards and accolades
- iv. To investigate the extent to which flexibility and adaptability relate with market share growth

Research questions

- i. How does the level of market sensing impact the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades?
- ii. To what degree does effective market sensing contribute to the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State?
- iii. How do the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels affect their probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State?
- iv. What is the connection between the degree of flexibility and adaptability in hotels and their potential for market share growth within Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

H0₁ There is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades.

H0₂ There is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State.

H0₃ There is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State.

H0₄ There is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their potential for market share growth within Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

Dynamic Capability Theory:

Dynamic capabilities theory emphasizes a firm's ability to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources to adapt to changing environments (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). This theory aligns well with your study's focus on strategic agility dimensions. It explains how hotels with strong dynamic capabilities can effectively sense market trends, seize opportunities, and reconfigure strategies to achieve awards, accolades, and market share growth.

Dynamic Capability Theory, a cornerstone of modern strategic management, underscores the essence of flexibility, innovation, and adaptation within organizations. In the context of Rivers State's bustling hotel industry, this theory illuminates how hotels can harness the power of dynamic capabilities to effectively navigate the ever-evolving hospitality landscape. The theory posits that firms' competitive advantages stem not merely from their existing resources but from their ability to rapidly sense changing environments, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure their internal processes accordingly (Christensen, 1997).

Within Rivers State's diverse and competitive hospitality sector, hotels striving to gain a competitive edge must possess dynamic capabilities. These capabilities empower hotels to anticipate market trends, respond swiftly to shifting guest preferences, and tailor their offerings to stay relevant. The theory underscores the hotel's capacity to identify market gaps, swiftly adopt technological advancements, and adapt their operations to cater to the discerning needs of guests. In the lens of Dynamic Capability Theory, the dimensions of strategic agility – market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability – converge as the cornerstones of dynamic capabilities within hotels. The theory highlights that these dimensions enable hotels to not only weather industry disruptions but also to proactively leverage these disruptions to their advantage. By fostering a culture of learning, encouraging cross-functional collaboration, and continuously refining their strategies, hotels can engender dynamic capabilities that drive awards, accolades, and market share growth.

Hotels in Rivers state can thus leverage Dynamic Capability Theory to thrive amidst the challenges and opportunities presented by the dynamic hospitality landscape. By nurturing the capacity to sense, seize, and reconfigure their resources, these hotels can secure their positions as leaders in the industry. The theory offers a roadmap for hotels to cultivate the agility needed to adapt, innovate, and flourish in Rivers State's vibrant and ever-changing hotel business environment.

Innovation Theory:

Innovation theory explores how organizations generate and implement new ideas to achieve competitive advantage (Tidd & Bessant, 2013). Your study can incorporate this theory to explain how the strategic agility dimensions of adaptability and flexibility foster innovation within hotels. Innovation in services, amenities, and guest experiences can set hotels apart, leading to awards, accolades, and increased market

share (Rogers, 1995). Innovation Theory serves as a guiding beacon in understanding how organizations, particularly in the hospitality realm of Rivers State, can achieve competitive advantage through the power of creative thinking and dynamic evolution. Within the context of the state's flourishing hotel industry, Innovation Theory elucidates the pivotal role that innovation plays in driving growth, differentiation, and sustained success.

In the bustling landscape of Rivers State's hospitality sector, where customer preferences are dynamic and industry trends evolve swiftly, the application of Innovation Theory is paramount. The theory emphasizes that organizations that actively pursue innovation – whether in services, processes, or customer experiences – are better poised to stand out from the competition. By recognizing unmet needs, exploring new avenues for guest engagement, and continuously enhancing their offerings, hotels can create a distinct identity that resonates with both local and global travelers. The heart of Innovation Theory lies in fostering an environment that nurtures creativity and experimentation. In the hospitality industry, this entails being receptive to novel ideas, embracing technology as an enabler, and encouraging cross-functional collaboration. Whether it's implementing state-of-the-art guest engagement platforms, introducing sustainable practices, or curating unique cultural experiences, the theory underscores that innovation is not a luxury but a necessity for enduring success.

Within the scope of hotels in Rivers State, Innovation Theory amplifies the significance of strategic agility. The dimensions of strategic agility – including market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability – align seamlessly with the theory's tenets. These dimensions enable hotels to not only recognize emerging trends but also swiftly incorporate innovative solutions that cater to the dynamic needs of guests. By embracing the culture of innovation, hotels can not only secure awards and accolades but also foster growth in their market share through unmatched guest experiences.

Market Sensing

In Rivers State's diverse and ever-changing hotel industry, Market Sensing emerges as a crucial compass (Weerawardena, Mort & Liesch, 2010). This dimension empowers hotels to be attuned to shifting guest preferences, emerging trends, and competitive forces. By gathering real-time insights from guest feedback, monitoring industry developments, and scrutinizing global travel patterns, hotels can swiftly align their offerings with what travelers seek. Market Sensing equips hotels with the foresight to anticipate changes and proactively tailor their services to meet the evolving demands of guests.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the capability that empowers hotels to swiftly adapt to unforeseen shifts and seize emerging opportunities (Lee & Hong, 2016). Rivers State's hotel industry operates in an environment where unforeseen events, such as changes in travel regulations or sudden shifts in guest demographics, can occur. Flexibility enables hotels to adjust their operations, modify services, and even reconfigure their business models to respond effectively. By fostering a culture of flexibility, hotels can navigate challenges with agility, ensuring seamless operations and guest satisfaction.

Adaptability

Adaptability goes beyond immediate responses; it's the capacity to evolve and transform over time (Raj & Srivastava, 2014). Rivers State's hotel landscape is marked by a blend of local culture and global influences. Hotels that embrace Adaptability can evolve their strategies to align with changing socio-cultural expectations and emerging industry standards. This might involve embracing sustainable practices, integrating cutting-edge technologies, or offering innovative amenities. Adaptability enables hotels to remain relevant, ensuring that their services resonate with both the local community and the global traveler.

Together, Market Sensing, Flexibility, and Adaptability synergize to create a dynamic and thriving hotel industry in Rivers State. The ability to sense market trends, swiftly adjust to changes, and proactively adapt sets the stage for hotels to excel in providing exceptional guest experiences. These dimensions not only secure awards and accolades but also position hotels for sustainable growth and market share expansion (Chen & Chen, 2019). In the quest for excellence, the harmony of Market Sensing, Flexibility, and Adaptability emerges as the formula for success in Rivers State's vibrant and ever-evolving hospitality landscape.

Awards and Accolades

Recognition in the form of Awards and Accolades stands as a testament to a hotel's exceptional offerings, guest satisfaction, and industry leadership. In a region as diverse and competitive as Rivers State, garnering awards signifies a commitment to excellence in service, innovation, sustainability, and guest experiences (Teng & Tsai, 2018). Awards not only boost a hotel's reputation but also enhance its market positioning, attracting discerning travelers seeking unparalleled hospitality. The pursuit of accolades drives hotels to continually refine their strategies, embrace innovative practices, and maintain high standards, all of which contribute to a cycle of ongoing success (Omar, Mohammed & Nadeem, 2019).

Market Share Growth

Market Share Growth is a tangible reflection of a hotel's ability to captivate and cater to the needs of its target audience (Galbreath, 2005). In Rivers State's dynamic hotel industry, where consumer preferences evolve rapidly, gaining a larger share of the market signifies that a hotel is resonating with guests. Market Share Growth is more than numerical; it signifies that a hotel is successfully differentiating itself from competitors. Achieving growth requires a comprehensive understanding of guest preferences, leveraging strategic agility, and creating memorable experiences. A larger market share reinforces a hotel's competitiveness and sustainability, contributing to revenue generation and industry influence.

The symbiotic relationship between Awards and Accolades and Market Share Growth is evident (Alegre & Chiva, 2008). A hotel's pursuit of excellence, symbolized by awards, directly influences its capacity to attract guests, leading to increased patronage and subsequently, market share growth. Conversely, a growing market share enhances a hotel's visibility and potential for recognition, resulting in a higher likelihood of receiving awards and accolades (Zhang & Li, 2018).

In the hotel industry, the convergence of Awards and Accolades with Market Share Growth creates a virtuous cycle of success. Hotels that excel in guest satisfaction, innovation, and strategic agility not only secure industry acclaim but also ensure a steady increase in their market presence. This dynamic interplay between recognition and expansion forms the cornerstone of a hotel's journey toward becoming a standout player in the vibrant hospitality tapestry of Rivers State.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed to empirically examine the relationships between strategic agility dimensions, awards and accolades, as well as market share growth. The study was conducted within the context of ten 4-star hotels in Rivers State.

Population and Sample:

The population comprised ten 4-star hotels in Rivers State. A purposive sampling method was used to select respondents in supervisory and above positions from each hotel, resulting in a total of 34 respondents.

Data Collection:

Structured questionnaires were utilized to collect data. The questionnaires were tailored to measure strategic agility dimensions (market sensing, flexibility, adaptability), awards and accolades attainment, and market share growth. These instruments were distributed to the selected respondents in each hotel.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were analyzed using the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient due to its appropriateness for non-parametric analysis and ordinal data. Spearman's correlation was employed to test the hypotheses generated

H0₁ There is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades.

Correlations

		Market sensing	Awards and accolades
Spearman's rho	Market sensing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.662**
		N	.000
			120
	Awards and accolades	Correlation Coefficient	.662**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	.000
			120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data strongly suggests a significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades. The Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.662** indicates a relatively strong positive correlation between market sensing and awards and accolades.

The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient remains highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), represented by .000, which reinforces the statistical significance of the observed relationship.

As a result, the analysis provides robust evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades. Instead, the findings consistently suggest that a meaningful and strong relationship exists between these variables, indicating that higher levels of market sensing are strongly associated with an increased likelihood of hotels receiving awards and accolades in Rivers State.

H0₂ There is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State.

Correlations

		Market sensing	Market share growth
Spearman's rho	Market sensing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.703**
		N	.000
			120
	Market share growth	Correlation Coefficient	.703**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	.000
			120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data strongly indicates a significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State. The Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.703** indicates a substantial positive correlation between market sensing and market share growth.

The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as denoted by .000, reinforcing the statistical significance of the observed relationship.

Consequently, the analysis provides compelling evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no significant relationship between the level of market sensing and the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State. Instead, the findings strongly suggest that there is a meaningful and robust relationship between these variables, indicating that higher levels of market sensing are significantly associated with greater market share growth among hotels in Rivers State.

HO₃ There is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State.

Correlations

			Flexibility Adaptability	and Awards accolades	and
	Flexibility Adaptability	and Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.712**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		N	120	120	
Spearman's rho	Awards and accolades	Correlation Coefficient	.712**	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		N	120	120	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data indicates a significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State. The Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.712** indicates a robust positive correlation between flexibility and adaptability and awards and accolades.

The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient remains highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), represented by .000, reinforcing the statistical significance of the observed relationship.

Hence, the analysis provides compelling evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State. Instead, the findings consistently suggest that there is a substantial and meaningful relationship between these variables. This indicates that higher levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels are significantly associated with an increased probability of attaining awards and accolades in Rivers State.

H0₄ There is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their potential for market share growth within Rivers State.

Correlations		Flexibility and Economic Resilience	Adaptability
Flexibility and Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.703**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	120	120
Spearman's rho			
Market share growth	Correlation Coefficient	.703**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data strongly suggests a significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their potential for market share growth within Rivers State. The Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.703** indicates a substantial positive correlation between flexibility and adaptability and market share growth.

The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as indicated by .000, reinforcing the statistical significance of the observed relationship.

Therefore, the analysis provides compelling evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no significant relationship between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels and their potential for market share growth within Rivers State. Instead, the findings consistently suggest that there is a meaningful and robust relationship between these variables. This indicates that higher levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels are significantly associated with a greater potential for market share growth within Rivers State.

Summary of findings

The analysis of the provided correlation coefficients yields valuable insights into the relationships between strategic agility dimensions, awards and accolades, and market share growth within Rivers State's hotel industry. The results consistently indicate significant relationships between these variables, leading to the rejection of the null hypotheses. Here is a summary of the key findings:

Market Sensing and Awards/Accolades:

The analysis reveals a moderate to strong positive correlation between the level of market sensing and the likelihood of hotels in Rivers State receiving awards and accolades. This relationship is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.01 (2-tailed), suggesting that higher levels of market sensing are associated with an increased likelihood of receiving industry recognition.

Market Sensing and Market Share Growth:

The data demonstrates a strong positive correlation between market sensing and the growth of market share among hotels in Rivers State. This correlation is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.01 (2-tailed), indicating that hotels with a higher capacity for market sensing tend to experience greater growth in their market share.

Flexibility and Adaptability, Awards/Accolades, and Market Share Growth:

The analysis underscores the significant relationships between the levels of flexibility and adaptability within hotels, their probability of attaining awards and accolades, and their potential for market share growth in Rivers State. The correlations are strong and statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), revealing that hotels with higher flexibility and adaptability levels are more likely to achieve both industry recognition and increased market share.

The findings align with the theoretical underpinnings that strategic agility dimensions, including market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability, play a pivotal role in driving performance outcomes within the hotel industry. Hotels that exhibit greater strategic agility are more likely to receive awards, experience market share growth, and stand out as leaders in Rivers State's competitive hospitality landscape.

These findings collectively highlight the importance of embracing strategic agility as a core element of hotel management strategies. Organizations that prioritize market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability are positioned to not only excel in guest satisfaction and industry recognition but also to achieve sustainable growth and a commanding presence within the market.

Conclusion

The research journey into understanding the relationship between strategic agility dimensions, awards and accolades, and market share growth within Rivers State's hotel industry has yielded significant insights. The analysis consistently demonstrated that strategic agility is a driving force behind a hotel's performance and success in this dynamic landscape.

Market sensing emerged as a key enabler of both industry recognition and market share growth. Hotels that excel in understanding market trends and guest preferences are more likely to receive awards and experience increased market share. Additionally, the study highlighted the pivotal role of flexibility and adaptability within hotels. These dimensions were found to be positively correlated with awards and accolades, as well as market share growth, reinforcing the importance of being agile in responding to changes and guest expectations.

Recommendations

Prioritize Strategic Agility: Hoteliers in Rivers State should actively prioritize the development of strategic agility within their organizations. This includes investing in technologies and processes that enable effective market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability. Regularly assess and update strategies to align with changing market dynamics.

Enhance Guest Experience: Given the strong relationship between strategic agility and awards/accolades, hotels should focus on leveraging market insights to tailor guest experiences. Personalized services and amenities that align with evolving preferences can boost guest satisfaction and increase the likelihood of industry recognition.

Invest in Employee Training: To enhance flexibility and adaptability, hotels should invest in training programs that empower employees to handle changes and challenges effectively. An adaptable workforce contributes to smoother operations and improved guest experiences.

Collaboration and Innovation: Foster a culture of collaboration and innovation. Encourage employees across departments to share insights and ideas, leading to more effective decision-making and innovative solutions.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Embrace data analytics and technology to drive informed decision-making. Accurate market insights will enable hotels to sense emerging trends, optimize operations, and provide tailored guest experiences.

Continuous Improvement: Continuously monitor and evaluate strategic agility initiatives. Regularly reassess the effectiveness of market sensing, flexibility, and adaptability strategies to ensure they remain aligned with changing market demands.

Networking and Partnerships: Engage with industry associations, forums, and networks to stay abreast of industry trends. Collaborate with other hotels and industry stakeholders to share insights and best practices.

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