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The Relationship Between Lean Adoption and Hotel Performance in Rivers State: The Moderating Effect of Owners' Interference

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Abstract

Every organization wants to outperform others in any business environment and to do this, managers of businesses must adopt principles that will help them actualize their general business objectives. This study investigated the moderating effect of owners' interference on the relationship between lean adoption and hotel performance in Rivers State. The study design was cross-sectional, and data were sourced from 750, the sample size is 330 hotel managers from specific local government areas (PHALGA and Obio Akpor). The study employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to explore the moderating effect of owners' interference on the relationship between lean adoption and hotel performance. The examination revealed that the owner's interference as a moderator indicated a non-significant negative effect. While not statistically significant, this suggests that the owner's interference, particularly when lacking professionalism or good intentions, can hinder hotel performance. The study thus recommended, for the sake of generalization, that the study be repeated with a bigger and more varied sample size.

Keywords*: Lean adoption, Customer focus, Customer involvement, Continuous improvement, Market share, Sales growth, Customer satisfaction*

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Background of the Study

Balancing ownership goals with optimal hotel operations is a constant struggle in the hospitality industry. On one hand, owners possess vital financial investment and long-term vision. On the other hand, excessive owner interference can disrupt established processes, hamper employee morale, and ultimately negatively impact hotel performance (Chen, 2011). This conundrum becomes even more nuanced with the adoption of lean practices. Lean, an operational philosophy prioritising efficiency and waste reduction has proven successful in various industries, yet its effectiveness in hotels hinges on a delicate dance between empowered operations and engaged ownership. However, the impact of owner interference on lean adoption is not always entirely negative. Research suggests that active owner engagement, when focused on strategic guidance and empowerment of the management team, can facilitate lean implementation (Narasimhan et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of open communication and collaborative decision-making to bridge the gap between owner vision and operational realities. Several studies explore this complex interplay. In their work titled "Lean Implementation in Hotels: The Moderating Role of Owner and Stakeholder Involvement," Narasimhan et al. (2016) conducted a study in Indian hotels, finding that active owner support fosters lean success. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2017) examined "The mediating role of leadership style in the relationship between lean practices and hotel performance" in the UAE, highlighting the importance of leadership behaviours in mitigating the negative effects of owner interference. These trends emphasize the need for further research investigating strategies to navigate the complexities of owner involvement and optimize lean adoption for improved hotel performance.

Hotel performance suffers due to conflicting priorities and operational disruptions arising from owner interference, while the potential benefits of lean practices to streamline operations and improve performance are hindered by the same. This challenge exists across diverse hotel types and sizes, impacting profitability, guest satisfaction, and employee engagement. Understanding how owner interference moderates the impact of lean adoption on hotel performance is crucial for developing effective management strategies. The challenges are multifaceted. Micromanagement and frequent changes in directives by owners can create confusion and inefficiency (Hassan et al., 2017). This can manifest as missed revenue opportunities due to inflexible pricing strategies, increased staff turnover from low morale, and sub-optimal resource allocation. Furthermore, owners might resist standardization, a core lean principle, due to a desire for individual control, hindering process improvement and consistency (Antony et al., 2006). These challenges are pervasive, affecting hotels globally, regardless of location or market segment. These challenges above propelled the current investigation, as most of the trends in research highlighted did not fit in the Rivers State study terrain, hence the gap the current study intends to close.

Literature Review

Lean Adoption

The term "lean" itself, encompasses a set of established practices and was first introduced by Womack et al. (1997) (Leite & Vieira, 2015). Urban (2015) defines lean management as "doing more with less." This can be understood as a system focused on creating quality products with minimal resource utilization (people, equipment, and space) to maximize output and offer diverse user choices (Rauch et al., 2016). Kim et al. (2010) describes lean as a production method striving to achieve customer-perceived value by eliminating all forms of "muda" (waste) to enhance product efficiency, quality, and value. The hospitality industry, known for producing large quantities of service based on customer needs and price points (Dudbridge, 2011), can benefit from this approach. Lean management identifies customer value by questioning whether each step in the process is worth paying for (Irani, 2011). For example, hotel room cleaning is considered valuable by guests. However, the process involved might include steps that offer no added value (Lancaster, 2011). Hence, lean aims to eliminate these non-value-adding steps without compromising product or service quality (Urban, 2015). By minimizing such variations, suppliers can ensure product delivery according to specifications, allowing Lean to focus on performance monitoring and control. While raw materials are one-factor differentiating lean application in hospitality (Dudbridge, 2011), Rauch et al. (2016) reported its applicability, albeit with limitations (Rauch et al., 2016). To thrive in today's competitive landscape, hospitality managers must embrace lean thinking, characterized by streamlined operations, efficient processes, and effective practices that yield a competitive edge (mention specific examples). A comprehensive lean toolkit and strategy are necessary to address wasteful lean practices and prioritize product and service quality, reliability, speed, and cost-effectiveness from the customer's perspective (Lameijer et al., 2016).

Continuous Improvement

Taylor and Wright (2003) defined continuous improvement practices as the combination of variable factors that will determine whether the firm succeeds or fails to succeed, especially the quality systems within an organization. Four phases are affiliated with the continuous improvement process, including plan, do, study, and act. The concept of continuous improvement bears many returns and benefits. The application of continuous improvement comes with huge and significant benefits as its application does not require high capital, and as such, employees' skills can be easily utilized. Through continuous improvement practices, employees reap advantages associated with performance improvement. Costa et al. (2019) suggested that organizations that do not implement continuous improvements are more likely to encounter variable structures in terms of re-arranging the organization, the layout, streamlining, and managerial practices and strategies that would help the delegate feel on the right track. Some of the key continuous improvement practices include the top leadership initiative and evidence-based decision-making (Schreiber & Meloncon, 2019). According to Juergensen (2000), it's "improvement initiatives that increase successes and reduce failures." Alefari et al. (2020) characterised it as a continuous process of improving goods, services, or procedures. Bhuiyan and Baghel (2005) advocate for a broader perspective, viewing it as a culture of sustained improvement aimed at eliminating waste across all organizational systems and processes. Ultimately, these continual enhancements propel organizations towards optimal production processes, requiring revisiting the improved process for proper implementation, addressing variations, and seeking further improvement opportunities (Deranek et al., 2017).

Customer Involvement

Consumer participation encompasses a wide variety of actions for both the consumer and the company. The least personal type of engagement is when customers provide unsolicited criticism or ideas to organizations. At its most complicated, the consumer actively participates in technological development and commercialization by contributing intellectually, monetarily, or physically. Integrating the consumer into the innovation process is seen as a strong way to minimize uncertainty and failure rates while increasing revenue from new goods (Rohrbeck et al., 2010). However, the advantages of involving the customer in the innovation process must be balanced against the expenses, since the customer's role has successfully shifted over the previous three decades from passive recipient to action co-designer in the production of value (Ernst, 2004). Customer participation may be described as the degree to which the customer participates in the value development and delivery process. It is the contact and/or collaboration between channel members (including consumers and users) and firm professionals during the product development process to bring a commercial product to market (Ernst, 2004). Customer engagement is a method that extends customer focus beyond customer relationship management. It entails discovering and creating ways to incorporate customers in company and product development activities such as design, marketing, sales, and customer support (Rohrbeck et al., 2010). With CI, the product is viewed as a subset of what the client needs for identification, issue resolution, and consumption. The possibility to influence the design and consumption itself is assumed to be of great importance for the consumers' buying decisions and loyalty. Customer participation is sometimes defined simply as persuading customers to perform more of the labor. Customer engagement in organizational activities has been acknowledged in operations management, organizational studies, and, specifically, service marketing (Bitner et al., 1997). Furthermore, the value of consumer interaction in services has long been recognized (Rohrbeck et al., 2010; Chung, 2006)

Customer Focus

The goal of customer service is to build long-lasting relationships with visitors, not just to fulfill their basic needs. By providing a warm welcome, exceeding the host's expectations, and anticipating their needs, the hotel may increase the host's trust and future visitation count. The hotel is successful when its loyal customers support the brand through positive reviews and online recommendations (Reichheld, 2001; Kandampully & Suh, 2000). A customer-focused approach makes use of the resources at hand. Studies reveal that investments in customer service initiatives yield significant returns on investment. Higher guest satisfaction translates into increased revenue through higher rates, additional spending, and repeat business. Additionally, positive online reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations attract new guests, further boosting profitability (Heskett et al.,2003; Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Technology plays a critical role in empowering hotels to implement effective customer-focused strategies. Digital tools enable personalization through guest preference tracking, real-time service feedback mechanisms, and personalized communication channels (Buhalis & Foerste, 2020). Additionally, online platforms like review websites and social media provide valuable insights into guest feedback and expectations, allowing hotels to continuously improve their service offerings (Gretzel et al., 2015). A customer-centric culture within the hotel organization starts with its employees. Investing in comprehensive training programs that equip staff with the skills and knowledge to deliver exceptional service is key to achieving customer focus. Training should emphasize empathy, active listening, problem-solving skills, and the ability to anticipate and exceed guest needs (Heskett et al., 2003). It is not only a simple motto to focus on the customer. In the hotel industry, it is the secret to success. By emphasizing client happiness, building trust, and encouraging a culture of service excellence, hotels can maintain their place in a cutthroat market and experience sustained development. Hoteliers will always need to embrace technology and give their staff the freedom they need to deliver great service and make lasting impressions on their visitors, even while the business undergoes constant change.

Hotel Performance

The ability to achieve one's own goals through effective management, strong governance, and a significant effort to achieve desired results is known as organisational performance (Brumbach, 1988). The concept of organisational performance is complex and lacks a universal definition (Odhiambo, 2016). Behaviors are more than just tools for achieving results; they are also outcomes in and of themselves. They are the result of the physical and mental effort required to complete tasks, and they can be evaluated independently of the results (Bourguignon, 2010). As a result, the author defines performance as being closely linked to both behavior and outcomes. When assessing the performance of teams and individuals, it is essential to consider both the inputs (behaviors) and the outputs (results). Performance, according to Bourguignon's definition (2010), is the attainment of organizational goals. This definition applies to all management fields, including management control, general politics, and human resources management. A performer is someone who achieves their goals. As a result, performance is contingent upon the objective or purpose. Performance is multifaceted when goals are numerous; it is a subset of action; and it is subjective because it is the product of operation, which, by its very nature, involves subjective interpretation to align reality with desire. According to Bourguignon (2010), performance is inextricably linked to objectives, making it impossible to arrive at a single, universally accepted definition of the concept. Consequently, achieving any objective or goal necessitates attaining a certain level of performance. Today, the performance of the hospitality industry is contingent upon customer focus and the provision of exceptional service that caters to customer needs and generates greater customer value (Deloitte, 2010).

Market Share

Hotels leverage market share data to gauge their competitive standing and drive profitability. Key metrics like occupancy rate and room revenue, compared against relevant competitors, reveal market share. This knowledge is crucial, as Kimes (2018) points out because it reflects competitiveness and influences pricing power and economies of scale. High market share, often correlated with higher revenue, allows hotels to capitalize on these advantages, particularly critical in an industry were success hinges on occupancy and revenue management. Market share insights inform strategic decisions on pricing, marketing, and growth. Hoteliers, aiming to increase market share and revenue, can use these insights to make informed decisions, as Kimes (2018) suggests. In today's competitive landscape, hotels continuously seek strategies to gain an edge and capture a larger market share (Kimes, 2018). One key strategy, as Kim and Gu (2019) suggest, is enhancing the guest experience. Delivering exceptional service, personalized options, and memorable vacations fuels repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately driving market share growth.

Sales Growth

Sales growth represents revenue increase over a period, driven by price hikes, higher sales volume, or both. Price-driven growth due to inflation doesn't reflect real sales growth, but lower costs contribute to its genuineness. Increased product sales due to expansion, new branches, or diversification also contribute to growth. Within the hotel industry, sales growth is crucial for success, reflecting customer attraction, revenue generation, and competitiveness (Johnson, 2019). It fuels investment in infrastructure, staff, and service quality, further attracting guests.

Owners Interference

Owner interference refers to the involvement of hotel owners or management in the daily operational decisions and processes of the hotel (Smith, 2019). It frequently involves direct engagement in areas like as pricing, staffing, and procurement, rather than delegating these operational responsibilities to the hotel's management team. Lean approaches aim to reduce waste, increase efficiency, and improve service quality. Brown (2018). However, excessive interference by owners in day-to-day operations can undermine lean principles, as choices may be motivated by short-term financial benefits rather than long-term process improvement (Smith, 2019). When owners get involved in personnel decisions, they may end up taking too much or too little personal responsibility since they may not fully understand the operational needs of hotel staff (Brown, 2018). The goal of lean principles is to optimize personnel levels to maximize operational efficiency (Johnson, 2020). Owners' involvement in pricing decisions can result in inconsistent pricing strategies that don't align with lean principles. Lean practices often call for standardized pricing models and efficient revenue management. When owners interfere, they may set prices that do not consider demand fluctuations, resulting in revenue loss. According to Tsegba and John**. (2012)**, there are two ways that owners' interference affects the relationship that already exists between lean techniques and hotel performance. First and foremost, it is possible that the benefits of lean practices—such as cost reduction and process optimization—will not be fully realized when owners micromanage operational decisions. Second, hotel employees' ability to apply lean thinking may be impacted by the owners' meddling, which can lead to conflicts and demotivation. The consequences of owners' interference can significantly impact hotel performance. Hotels that successfully implement lean practices often experience improved customer satisfaction, reduced operational costs, and increased revenue. However, when owners disrupt lean processes, these benefits are compromised, leading to suboptimal performance. Hotel owners need to strike a balance between oversight and allowing the hotel's management to implement lean practices effectively.

Theoretical Review

Schumpeterian Theory

The Schumpeterian hypothesis, as proposed by Joseph Schumpeter in 1934, serves as the foundation for the current investigation. Our study is based on this theory since it highlights the constant need for adaptation and development while shedding light on the dynamic character of market and economic processes. Schumpeter believed that an economy's equilibrium is ephemeral, continually giving birth to forces of change and new requirements. The crucial role that investors play in bringing about changes within enterprises is at the heart of his thesis. According to him, innovation is a natural byproduct of investment since new combinations of the ingredients of production are always being evaluated. The drivers underpinning economic progress are the drastic and discontinuous changes brought about by this unrelenting pursuit of innovation (Schumpeter, 1934). The importance of altering organisational dynamics is shown by Schumpeter's claim that businesses generate profit and investment growth by conceiving novel company strategies (Anning-Doson, 2017). Changes of this kind involve not only the development of entirely new products but also the adoption of new technologies, new business models, and routine integration in order to provide integrated goods and services. In this context, Schumpeter views innovation as a critical factor in the success of businesses. Schumpeter's theory is highly relevant to our present study, which focuses on process improvement strategies within the hotel industry. The notion emphasises how important it is to change the way hotels handle their product. It suggests significant modifications to procedures and creative restructures in the hospitality industry (Schumpeter, 1934). As a result, the theory recommends using customer-oriented ideas and systemic restructuring in corporate processes. This emphasis on adaptability and responsiveness enables hotels to meet changing market demands and aligns well with the lean adoption practices we intend to explore in our study. In essence, Schumpeter's theory offers valuable insights into how hotels can enhance their performance through dynamic adaptation and innovation.

Empirical Review

Smith (2022) looked into how owner intervention affected the adoption of lean in American hotels. It was discovered that the association between lean adoption techniques and hotel performance was significantly moderated by the intervention of the owners. A less positive correlation between lean adoption and hotel performance was linked to higher degrees of owner intervention. These findings suggest that owner interference can hinder the effectiveness of lean adoption practices in hotels. Johnson (2018) compared the impact of owner interference on lean adoption in hotels in Asia and Europe. He found that owner interference had a more pronounced moderating effect in Asian hotels compared to European hotels. These findings suggest that cultural factors may influence the impact of owner interference on lean adoption. Tao (2019) looked at how owner-manager disagreement affected hotel performance and the adoption of lean. He found that tension between the owner and manager resulted from the owner's intervention, which acted as a moderating force. When significant owner-manager disagreement resulted from intervention, the relationship between lean adoption and hotel performance was drastically reduced. These findings suggest that disagreements between owners and managers may make it more difficult for hotels to implement lean practices. Brown (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on how owners' adoption of lean methods affected hotel performance. He found that owner participation frequently had a significant moderating influence on the relationship between lean approaches and hotel performance. The total effect size demonstrated that the more owners intervened in operational decisions, the less of an impact lean adoption had on improving hotel performance. These results add to the body of literature showing how owner intervention might reduce the efficacy of lean adoption strategies in lodging establishments.

Methodology

Using owners' interference as a moderator variable, this study examines the links between lean adoption methods and hotel performance in Rivers State hotels. It presents a picture of these linkages at a particular moment in time using a cross-sectional design. Since there is no central database, the researcher uses data from hotels that are formally registered with the Nigerian Hotel Association (NHA). The targeted audience consists of 395 hotel managers from certain geographic areas (PHALGA and Obio Akpor). Using specialist software, the data were rigorously checked for missing values, outliers, normality, and multicollinearity before the key study goals were examined. By taking these precautions, the data's legitimacy and integrity are ensured for precise analysis. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used in this study to investigate the connections between several independent factors and dependent variables. PLS-SEM, which combines elements of multiple regression and principal component analysis, is a useful tool for complicated modeling in the social and management sciences (e.g., Hair et al., 2014; Mateos-Aparicio, 2011). Furthermore, it gives prediction precedence over rigorous causal interpretations (Sarstedt et al., 2017). There are two primary phases to the analysis: Good construct representation by individual indicators is shown by measurement model assessment, which comprises indicator loadings and strong loadings (>0.7) (Hair et al., 2017). Better dependability and internal consistency are indicated by higher scores (0.7–0.9). Values higher than 0.95 might indicate response bias or redundancy. Extracted Average Variance (AVE): Convergent validity is acceptable when scores are more than 0.5, indicating that constructs measure what they're supposed to.

Second, the structural model evaluation has examined the path coefficients, which assess the strength and direction of the relationships among the variables. Goodness-of-fit indices, such as the Normalized Fit Index (NFI) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Deviation (SRMR), provide a measurement of the model's conformance in terms of dimensions and significance. The outputs of the model are guaranteed to be resilient and interpretable by these requirements.

Results and Discussion of Findings

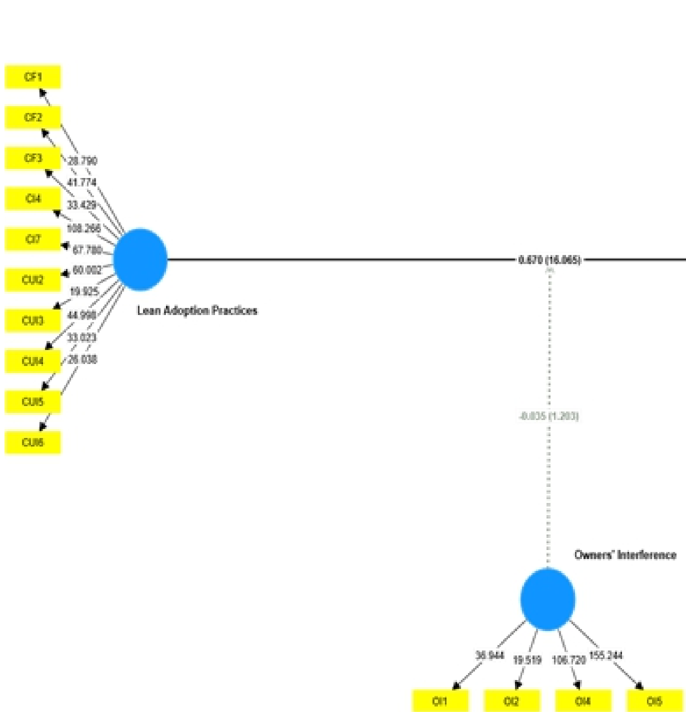

Fig. 2: Moderating effect of owner's interference on the relationship between lean adoption practices and hotels competitiveness

Table 1: Path Analysis Result of The Direct Hypothesis Testing of Lean adoption practices and Hotel Performance

	Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Standard Error	T -Value	Decisions	f-Squared	Effect size
1.	OI x LAP-> HP	-0.035	0.101	0.051	1.203	Not Supported	5.435	Large

Source: The Researcher's Computation (2023).

The aforementioned table presents the path analysis results investigating the moderating influence of owners' interference on the association between lean adoption practices and hotel performance within Rivers State (insert reference). Notably, the analysis examined the moderating effect on each of the previously established direct relationships. The structural path model indicated that owners' interference exerts a negative moderating effect on the lean adoption-hotel performance nexus, with a coefficient of -0.035 ($p = 0.101 > 0.05$; t-value = $1.203 < 1.96$). Consequently, the null hypothesis proposing no moderating effect was retained. Despite the observed negative moderation, the effect was deemed statistically insignificant due to p and t values exceeding established thresholds. Therefore, the findings suggest that owners' interference does not moderate the relationship between lean adoption practices and hotel performance within the given context. The examination of the owner's interference as a moderator indicated a non-significant negative effect (beta = -0.035, $p > 0.05$, $t = 1.203$). While not statistically significant, this suggests that the owner's interference, particularly when lacking professionalism or good intentions, can hinder hotel performance. This aligns with Smith (2022), Johnson (2018), and Tao (2019), who reported negative associations between owner interference and hotel performance or the relationship between lean practices and performance.

Conclusion

In Rivers State, Nigeria, this study examined the moderating role of owner intervention in the link between lean adoption principles and hotel performance. The study demonstrated that owner interference did not substantially reduce the favourable impact of lean adoption on hotel performance, using PLS-SEM analysis. The relationship between lean adoption and hotel performance did not show a moderating influence from owner intervention, contrary to theoretical assumptions. This implies that owners' involvement—however invasive—might not always impede the advantages of lean techniques in the hotel sector in Rivers State. Based on this, the researcher recommended that to improve generalizability, the study should be repeated with a larger and more varied sample. Examine any cultural elements that could have an impact on owner intervention and how it is viewed. Improve the way owner interference and hotel performance are measured to better reflect their complicated relationships.

Implications of the Study

Management Implications: Hotel owners must strike a balance between giving direction and granting autonomy for lean adoption, even if owner interference did not show a negative moderating effect in this study. A supportive atmosphere for effective lean adoption may be fostered by owners and workers via open communication, cooperation, and trust.

Policy Implications: Stakeholders in the hospitality sector, such as associations and regulatory agencies, should raise awareness and educate the public about lean techniques and how they may improve hotel performance. Initiatives that promote trust and honest communication between employers and staff should also be supported.

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