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ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated the influence of innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, calculated risk taking, and proactiveness on business growth. A survey research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population comprised 23,373 registered hotels and restaurants, from which a sample size of 393 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A total of 372 valid questionnaires were analyzed, representing a 94.66% response rate. Additionally, six Focus Group Discussions involving 54 owners and senior managers were conducted. Data were collected using structured questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. SPSS was employed to test four hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The results revealed that innovativeness ($R = 0.768$), competitive aggressiveness ($R = 0.741$), calculated risk taking ($R = 0.783$), and proactiveness ($R = 0.812$) all have significant positive effects on hospitality business growth. Proactiveness emerged as the strongest predictor. Qualitative findings further validated the quantitative results. The study concludes that entrepreneurial orientation significantly drives growth, competitiveness, and sustainability in the hospitality sector. It recommends strategic innovation, proactive market engagement, and structured risk management to enhance performance.

KEYWORDS: *Entrepreneurial Orientation, Innovativeness, Competitive Aggressiveness, Risk Taking, Proactiveness, Hospitality Business Growth, South-South Nigeria*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is one of the fastest-growing service-oriented sectors globally. It plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of both developed and developing nations. In Nigeria, the industry is found in various strategic urban and semi-urban areas, rendering critical services to individuals, organizations, and the government. Primarily, the hospitality business is structured around delivering value through services such as accommodation, food and beverage sales, recreational activities, and entertainment. These services cater to guests and visitors, whether they come from within the locality or outside the immediate geographical region. The significance of the hospitality industry cannot be overstated. It is inherently people-oriented, as it involves direct human interaction, satisfaction of client needs, and the creation of lasting customer experiences. The unique nature of this industry makes it an essential tool for enhancing tourism, driving local development, and promoting cultural exchange. It is often considered the bedrock for urban development and infrastructural improvement, as it attracts both local and foreign investments to regions in which it thrives.

Beyond providing customer-centric services, the hospitality sector makes considerable contributions to economic growth and development. One of the most striking economic benefits is employment creation. The sector is known to offer job opportunities across various levels of skill and expertise, ranging from managerial positions to unskilled labour. This makes it a significant employer, especially in a country like Nigeria, where unemployment and underemployment remain persistent socio-economic challenges.

Additionally, the hospitality industry has a ripple effect on other sectors such as agriculture, transport, real estate, entertainment, and the retail market. Restaurants and hotels often procure foodstuffs from local farmers and suppliers, thereby boosting agricultural productivity and rural income. Transport companies benefit from increased mobility and logistics services, while real estate experiences growth due to the demand for structures that can be converted into hospitality facilities.

The impact of the hospitality sector on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is also noteworthy. According to Oyinbo (2013), the industry contributes more than 10% to the GDP of many nations, emphasizing its importance as a major player in national economic frameworks. It is also regarded as one of the largest employers in the global workforce, accounting for millions of jobs across continents. In Nigeria, while official statistics may vary, the hospitality and tourism subsector are believed to be among the top contributors to non-oil revenue, making it essential for diversification of efforts in a predominantly oil-dependent economy. Despite the growing body of research, empirical studies focusing on entrepreneurial orientation (EO) within the hospitality industry remain relatively sparse, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. This is concerning given the sector's contribution to economic development and its potential as a growth engine for regional and national economies. Hospitality enterprises, especially in the South-South region of Nigeria, face numerous challenges including infrastructural deficits, fluctuating market demands, security concerns, and poor regulatory frameworks. These challenges necessitate innovative, proactive, competitive aggression and risk-taking approaches, all of which fall under the purview of entrepreneurial orientation.

The growth of hospitality businesses is often measured through multiple indicators such as profitability, customer satisfaction, market share, employee retention, and brand reputation at the firm level. These indicators are strongly influenced by the strategic orientation of the enterprise. Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) contributes to better business performance by promoting innovation in service delivery, flexibility in operations, and strategic responsiveness to market dynamics. For example, a hotel that adopts digital booking systems, incorporates local cultural experiences in its services, and diversifies its offerings to include corporate events is more likely to outperform traditional competitors.

In Nigeria's South-South region, which comprises states like Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross River, Bayelsa, Edo, and Delta, the hospitality sector is expanding but remains underexplored in terms of entrepreneurial research. These states are rich in tourism attractions, cultural heritage, and business activities, making them ideal for hospitality ventures. However, the extent to which hospitality business operators adopt and implement EO remains unclear. This knowledge gap presents an opportunity for empirical investigation to understand how EO affects business sustainability and competitiveness in this region.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

There is gain saying that the operational environment of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria is highly dynamic, opportunistic and challenging. To survive and thrive in such environment, owners and managers of hospitality businesses need to evolve strategies that will boost their growth. Entrepreneurial orientation is one prominent concept in strategic management and entrepreneurship literature that is identified as having the potential to positively influence the growth of hospitality businesses in many parts of the world. It follows therefore, that adopting EO may enhance the growth of hospitality businesses. To date, in Nigeria, there are few studies in this area, conducted to establish the relationship between EO and growth of hospitality businesses generally. But to the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of such researches is executed in the South-South region of Nigeria. The few studies carried out are not empirically driven for more intellectual probe and discoveries in hospitality businesses in South-South region of the nation. This then creates a gap in previous knowledge which this study seeks to bridge.

Thus, it is against this background that this research work will be conducted to examine the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth of hospitality businesses in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study will be to examine the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria. The specific objectives will be:

i. To examine the effect of innovativeness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
ii. To determine the effect of competitive aggressiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
iii. To determine the effect of calculated risk taking of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
iv. To determine the effect of proactiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What is the effect of innovativeness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria?
ii. What is the effect of competitive aggressiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria?
iii. What is the effect of calculated risk taking of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria?
iv. What is the effect of proactiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

i. There is no significant effect of innovativeness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
ii. There is no significant effect of competitive aggressiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
iii. There is no significant effect of calculated risk taking of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.
iv. There is no significant effect of proactiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CONCEPT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) is the strategic posture of a business characterized by innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, risk-taking and proactiveness. It encompasses the processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry or support existing operations in a dynamic and competitive environment (Eze *et al*., 2022). In Nigeria's volatile economic climate, EO has become increasingly vital as businesses, especially in the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) sector, struggle to remain competitive and grow sustainably. The EO framework is now widely adopted as a tool to navigate market complexities and create value in uncertain conditions (Akingbade & Famodun, 2024).

Scholars have offered several definitions of EO. According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), EO is the methods, practices, and decision-making styles managers use to act entrepreneurially. Miller (1983) initially described EO as the degree to which top managers are inclined to take risks, innovate, and act proactively. EO refers to the strategic posture and behavioral tendencies of firms that promote entrepreneurial activities such as innovation, risk-taking, and proactive decision-making (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Covin & Wales, 2019). It provides the framework through which businesses, including SMEs and larger enterprises, navigate competitive markets and seize growth opportunities. The growing interest in EO reflects its relevance in explaining firm performance, competitive advantage, and long-term sustainability. In the Nigerian context, Muazu *et al*., (2023) defined EO as a strategic posture that stimulates SMEs' performance by enhancing their capacity to engage in risk-taking, innovation, and competitive behavior within their operational environments.

The most widely recognized dimensions of EO are innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Innovativeness refers to the tendency to support creativity and experimentation. Risk-taking denotes the willingness to commit resources to uncertain ventures. Proactiveness involves anticipating and acting on future demands. Competitive aggressiveness reflects a firm's ability to challenge competitors directly, and autonomy refers to independent actions taken by leaders or teams to bring forth innovative ideas (Egberi, 2023). These dimensions have proven essential for Nigerian SMEs to remain resilient in turbulent environments such as the South-South geopolitical zone (Daniel & Chukwuemeka, 2023).

EO is significant because it offers strategic guidance for firms to foster innovation, gain market share, and improve overall performance. In Nigeria, EO enables SMEs to overcome challenges like poor infrastructure, regulatory bottlenecks, and limited access to capital. Firms exhibiting high EO are better positioned to exploit new opportunities, adapt to change, and sustain competitiveness (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020). The importance of EO is particularly evident in Nigeria’s hospitality, agro-processing, and manufacturing sectors, where innovation and market foresight can determine long-term survival.

Empirical studies have confirmed the positive influence of EO on firm growth in Nigeria. Eze *et al*., (2022) found that innovativeness and proactiveness significantly affect the performance of agro-processing SMEs in Anambra State. Similarly, Akingbade and Famodun (2024) reported that risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness positively influenced competitive advantage among SMEs in Lagos State. Egberi (2023) demonstrated that EO was a critical determinant of strategic positioning and survival for hospitality businesses in the South-South region.

DIMENSIONS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) is a multidimensional construct that captures the entrepreneurial behavior of firms. Scholars, especially Lumpkin and Dess (1996), expanded EO beyond Miller's (1983) original framework to include five key dimensions: innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness. These dimensions provide a lens through which a firm’s entrepreneurial posture can be assessed.

i. Innovativeness

Innovativeness reflects a firm’s tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes. It involves the development of new products, services, and technologies. Firms high in innovativeness are more likely to invest in R&D and explore unconventional solutions (Covin & Wales, 2019). This dimension fosters differentiation and long-term strategic advantage.

ii. Calculated Risk-Taking

This dimension refers to a firm’s willingness to commit resources to ventures with uncertain outcomes. It involves bold actions such as entering unfamiliar markets, making large resource commitments, or borrowing heavily to exploit opportunities (Kreiser et al., 2013). Risk-taking is a hallmark of entrepreneurial firms seeking growth and market leadership. Within an entrepreneurial orientation framework, risk-taking is not only the willingness to take a chance on an opportunity, it is the ability of the business to use calculated actions to mitigate the risk involved in opportunity pursuit.

iii. Proactiveness

Proactiveness is the forward-looking perspective that enables firms to anticipate and act on future demands or changes in the market. Proactive firms are often first movers, shaping the environment rather than reacting to it. They seize opportunities ahead of competitors and are often seen as leaders in innovation and market trends (Rauch *et al*., 2009).

iv. Competitive Aggressiveness

Competitive aggressiveness reflects a firm’s tendency to directly and intensely challenge its competitors. This may include aggressive pricing, intensive marketing, or tactical maneuvers to outperform rivals. It is different from proactiveness in that it focuses more on confrontation and response to competitors rather than anticipating market trends (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996).

These four dimensions collectively define the entrepreneurial behavior of firms. While some firms may emphasize certain dimensions more than others based on their strategy or industry, the integrated presence of these elements often determines the overall entrepreneurial orientation of the organization.

THE GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

The hospitality industry plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of nations by creating employment opportunities, stimulating tourism, and contributing to GDP growth. In Nigeria, especially in the South-South region, the hospitality sector has gained increasing prominence due to its cultural diversity, natural attractions, and growing urbanization. Business growth refers to the process through which a firm increases its size, output, and profitability over time. According to Penrose (1959), growth is the increase in the long-term capacity of a firm to generate sales and profits by expanding its resources and capabilities. Similarly, Daft (2010) defines growth as the expansion in an organization's size, scope, and market reach, often reflected in increased revenue, market share, or number of customers. In the context of hospitality, growth may manifest through increased hotel occupancy rates, establishment of new outlets, improved customer satisfaction, and diversification of services.

Several factors contribute to the expansion of hospitality businesses in the South-South region. First, tourism continues to be a key driver. The promotion of local festivals, ecotourism, and cultural heritage has increased tourist inflow, requiring supportive hospitality services (Orok & Udo, 2022). Second, infrastructure development—such as the construction of roads, airports, and event centers like the Calabar International Conference Center—has made the region more accessible and attractive to investors (NTDC, 2023). Furthermore, government initiatives like the "Tour Nigeria" project have helped promote domestic tourism, leading to increased demand for hospitality services (Tour Nigeria, 2023). Foreign direct investment and the presence of international hotel brands such as Protea, Marriott, and Sheraton in cities like Port Harcourt and Benin also reflect the region's growing hospitality potential (BTM Limited, 2024).

The future of hospitality businesses in the South-South region appears promising if current investments and policy reforms continue. With increased security, better infrastructure, and more training programs for hospitality professionals, the sector is poised for sustainable growth. Moreover, leveraging digital platforms for booking, customer feedback, and marketing can enhance visibility and profitability for businesses in the region. In conclusion, growth in the hospitality sector in the South-South region of Nigeria is not only possible but already taking shape due to increasing tourism, urbanization, and supportive government policies. By addressing current challenges and maximizing existing opportunities, hospitality businesses can thrive and contribute significantly to regional and national development.

DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES

Growth in the hospitality industry can be multidimensional, reflecting various aspects through which a business expands its operations, influence, and profitability. These dimensions serve as key indicators for assessing the development and sustainability of hospitality firms over time. The following are widely recognized dimensions of growth in the hospitality sector:

i. Financial Growth

This dimension refers to the increase in financial metrics such as revenue, profit margins, return on investment (ROI), and asset value. In hospitality, financial growth is often measured by metrics such as average daily rate (ADR), revenue per available room (RevPAR), and net profit. Financial growth reflects a firm's ability to maximize income from its services and manage costs effectively. According to Radojevic et al. (2018), financial performance remains a core dimension of business growth as it ensures long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

ii. Customer Base Expansion

An expanding customer base indicates that a hospitality business is attracting more guests, retaining repeat customers, and reaching new markets. Growth in this area could be seen in rising occupancy rates, increased footfall in restaurants or event venues, or higher engagement via digital platforms. Chathoth & Olsen (2019) suggest that hospitality firms that understand and respond to changing customer preferences are more likely to experience growth in market reach and loyalty.

iii. Market Expansion

Market expansion refers to a firm's ability to enter new geographic markets or customer segments. For hospitality businesses, this can involve opening new branches, partnering with travel agencies, or listing on international booking platforms. This dimension shows strategic scaling of operations beyond existing territories. Kandampully *et al*. (2020) emphasize that global or regional market penetration is a critical indicator of a hospitality firm's strategic growth trajectory.

iv. Service and Product Diversification

Growth in the variety and quality of services offered is another vital dimension. Hospitality businesses may introduce new offerings such as wellness packages, virtual concierge services, or local tourism experiences to enhance customer satisfaction and attract niche markets. As noted by Ali *et al.* (2021), diversification allows firms to reduce dependency on core services and increases resilience in the face of market fluctuations.

v. Human Capital Development

Employee growth, both in quantity and quality, is a significant dimension of hospitality business growth. This includes hiring skilled personnel, providing training, reducing turnover, and fostering a service-oriented organizational culture. According to Baum (2020), effective human resource practices in the hospitality sector not only enhance service delivery but also reflect internal business growth and operational maturity.

vi. Technological Advancement

Incorporating modern technology—such as property management systems, online booking engines, and customer relationship management tools—is an important growth dimension. Technological integration boosts efficiency, improves guest experience, and enhances data-driven decision-making. As pointed out by Law *et al.* (2020), technology adoption is a strong indicator of innovation and digital maturity in hospitality businesses.

The growth of hospitality businesses is a multifaceted process involving financial progress, customer and market expansion, diversification of services, staff development, and technology integration. Measuring growth through these dimensions helps managers and stakeholders make informed decisions that align with strategic goals and industry trends.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION AND GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

Entrepreneurship orientation (EO) has emerged as a pivotal framework for understanding the strategic posture of businesses in rapidly changing environments, especially in emerging economies. In the context of hospitality businesses in Nigeria's South-South region—which includes states such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross River, Bayelsa, Edo, and Delta—EO is vital for navigating the region's complex socio-economic terrain. The hospitality industry in this region is particularly significant due to its strategic role in tourism, oil-related business travel, and cultural heritage (Okeke *et al*., 2022). EO encompasses key dimensions such as innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness, which collectively shape the trajectory of business growth (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Rauch *et al*., 2009). The interplay of these EO dimensions—innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness—directly influences the growth of hospitality businesses. Growth in this context encompasses increased profitability, expansion of service offerings, enhanced market presence, and organizational sustainability. Empirical studies affirm that EO has a positive and significant relationship with firm growth (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005; Keh *et al*., 2007). Specifically, in the Nigerian context, Uchenna and Osemene (2021) found that EO significantly predicts the growth performance of tourism-related SMEs. The EO framework thus serves as both a strategic lens and a practical tool for entrepreneurs aiming to expand and stabilize their businesses in a highly competitive sector.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship orientation is a vital determinant of the growth of hospitality businesses in Nigeria's South-South region. The strategic deployment of innovation, calculated risk-taking, proactive behavior, and competitive aggressiveness enables firms to thrive in an unpredictable environment marked by both challenges and opportunities. For policymakers and development agencies, fostering an enabling environment that supports EO—through training, access to finance, and infrastructural development—can stimulate economic growth and employment in the region's hospitality sector. As such, future research and practice should focus on strengthening the EO capabilities of hospitality entrepreneurs to ensure long-term business sustainability and regional development.

INNOVATION AND THE GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

Innovation has increasingly become a cornerstone for competitive advantage and business growth in the global hospitality industry. In the South-South region of Nigeria—comprising Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, and Edo States—the hospitality sector is evolving rapidly due to the pressures of globalization, tourism growth, and shifting consumer expectations. Amidst this transformation, innovation emerges as a vital strategic orientation capable of enhancing operational performance, service quality, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, business growth.

Innovation in the hospitality sector encompasses the introduction of new or significantly improved service offerings, operational processes, marketing techniques, and organizational methods. According to Schumpeter's (1934) theory of innovation, economic development is primarily driven by the entrepreneur's ability to innovate, which includes creating new combinations of resources and ideas. In the context of hospitality, this could mean adopting digital booking platforms, smart technologies, green hotel initiatives, or even new culinary experiences. These innovations not only meet changing guest expectations but also boost the firm's reputation and competitiveness (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005).

RISK-TAKING AND THE GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

Risk-taking, as a core dimension of entrepreneurial orientation, plays a pivotal role in determining how businesses confront uncertainty and seize growth opportunities. In the dynamic and increasingly competitive hospitality industry of Nigeria's South-South region, risk-taking has become indispensable for sustainable business development. The hospitality sector, heavily influenced by market volatility, seasonal tourism patterns, infrastructural limitations, and customer expectations, necessitates a proactive willingness to commit resources to uncertain ventures in order to secure growth.

Risk-taking in entrepreneurship refers to the firm's readiness to engage in ventures with uncertain outcomes, particularly when there is a possibility of significant gains or losses. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) define it as the degree to which managers are willing to make large and uncertain resource commitments—such as entering new markets, investing in untested technology, or launching novel service offerings. In the context of the hospitality industry, this may involve investing in tourism innovations, expanding to underdeveloped locations, or introducing high-cost service upgrades that have not yet been tested in the local market. Risk-taking thus implies a forward-looking, growth-driven mindset that helps firms differentiate themselves in a crowded industry.

The relationship between risk-taking and business growth is also underpinned by the firm's strategic posture. Businesses with a high risk-taking orientation often display flexibility, rapid decision-making, and readiness to exploit new opportunities, which aligns with the volatile nature of the hospitality sector. For instance, hotels in Calabar that took the risk of developing cultural tourism packages tailored to international festivals, such as the Calabar Carnival, experienced substantial brand visibility and long-term customer loyalty (Victor *et al.,* 2022). These outcomes highlight how calculated risks, if properly managed, can lead to significant and sustainable growth.

COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS AND THE GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

Competitive aggressiveness is a critical element of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) that significantly shapes the strategic posture of businesses in dynamic markets. Within the context of the hospitality industry in Nigeria's South-South region, competitive aggressiveness plays a vital role in determining the pace and scale of business growth. Given the increasing competition in hospitality services driven by domestic tourism, urban development, and investor interest, firms that exhibit competitive aggressiveness are more likely to achieve growth and sustainability. Competitive aggressiveness refers to a firm's tendency to directly and intensely challenge its competitors to gain or protect market share. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) defined it as the intensity of a firm's efforts to outperform rivals through bold and sometimes combative strategies such as price wars, aggressive marketing, product improvements, and market entry tactics. Unlike proactiveness, which emphasizes being first to act on opportunities, competitive aggressiveness is focused on outmaneuvering competitors already operating in the same space.

In the hospitality sector, competitive aggressiveness manifests through tactics such as superior customer service delivery, dynamic pricing models, strategic location choices, aggressive advertising campaigns, and diversification of services. In the South-South region of Nigeria, where cities like Calabar, Uyo, Port Harcourt, and Benin City are fast becoming tourist and business destinations, competition among hotels, resorts, and guest houses is intensifying. According to Eze *et al*. (2020), hospitality businesses that aggressively implement differentiated service packages, loyalty programs, and customer-focused innovation tend to outperform their rivals in terms of revenue growth, customer retention, and brand visibility.

The relationship between competitive aggressiveness and business growth is supported by several empirical studies. For example, Obi and Igwe (2022) conducted a survey of 150 hospitality businesses across the Niger Delta states and found a strong positive correlation between competitive aggressiveness and firm growth indicators such as occupancy rate, return on investment (ROI), and market expansion. Businesses that were more assertive in pursuing market share—through digital marketing, partnerships with travel agencies, and competitive pricing—recorded higher growth compared to those that adopted a passive competitive stance. Moreover, Ibrahim and Shariff (2016) highlight that competitive aggressiveness enables firms to adapt swiftly to changes in customer preferences and external pressures, which is crucial in volatile environments like the Nigerian hospitality industry. By being aggressive in their market tactics, businesses are better equipped to capture latent demand, respond quickly to rival strategies, and strengthen their positioning in both local and international markets.

PROACTIVENESS AND GROWTH OF HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

The hospitality industry in the South-South region of Nigeria has experienced growing attention due to increased tourism, oil-sector business travel, and urbanization. However, to thrive in this competitive and volatile environment, hospitality businesses must adopt strategic postures that ensure resilience and growth. One such posture is proactiveness, a core dimension of entrepreneurial orientation (EO), which is vital in helping businesses identify emerging opportunities and lead market innovation. Proactiveness refers to a forward-looking perspective characterized by the anticipation and pursuit of future market demands and emerging trends before competitors (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). It is about initiating change rather than merely responding to it. Proactive firms do not wait for external pressures to act; instead, they seek new markets, invest in research, and implement novel ideas early to capitalize on untapped opportunities.

In the context of hospitality businesses, proactiveness manifests in activities such as adopting digital booking systems, developing eco-friendly accommodation, diversifying service offerings, and aligning operations with shifting customer preferences. According to Eze *et al*. (2020), proactiveness in the hospitality sector is critical for creating customer-centric innovations and staying ahead in a market where service quality is the main differentiator. The growth of hospitality businesses is largely dependent on their ability to predict and adapt to changes in consumer expectations and the competitive environment. Proactive firms in the South-South region have been found to outperform others in revenue growth, customer retention, and brand development. For example, Obi and Igwe (2022) reported that hotels in Uyo and Calabar that anticipated the post-COVID demand for contactless services and invested in mobile check-ins and online payments recorded a 30% increase in customer satisfaction and patronage within one year.

2.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theory that help to explain, predict and validate the outcomes of this study is Schumpeterian theory of innovation. Meanwhile this work will be anchored on Schumpeterian theory of innovation.

SCHUMPETERIAN THEORY OF INNOVATION

Schumpeter (1942), the pioneer of innovation, highlighted the importance of innovation to entrepreneurial development. Schumpeter (1942) describes the process of "creative destruction". This happens when market structures that are existing get disrupted, when new goods are introduced and new services are offered, that transfers available resources from existing businesses to upcoming ones, resulting in wealth creation through establishments of new firms. Accordingly, Schumpeter calls innovation the specific instrument of entrepreneurship, the means through which entrepreneurs use change to create a business opportunity by offering different products and providing different services. Schumpeter (1942) stressed the role of entrepreneurs as main agents carrying out creative destruction, and emphasized to entrepreneurs the need to look with determination for the sources of innovation, and the characteristics that indicate opportunities for successful innovation as well as applying innovations successfully. Schumpeterian theory supports the fact that technological development coming through innovations is propelled by businessmen pursuing profit. That is, each innovation creates new products and processes that provide the originator with a competitive edge in the market place over business rivals. It renders previous innovations obsolete and would be done the same in the future by newer innovations. Innovation is very important to entrepreneurship as it is an element of economic growth in any country. In the view of Ling, (2008), nations with the largest economies can be linked with great devotion to innovation and research. Curric, (2008) found out that in an external situation that is ever changing, innovation and entrepreneurial conduct are processes that are holistic, energetic and essentially balanced to business sustainability and success,

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 STUDY SETTING

The study was situated in the South-South region of Nigeria, one of the six geopolitical zones in the country. The region comprised six states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, and Delta. These states were richly endowed with natural resources, cultural diversity, and vibrant economic activities, with tourism and hospitality playing an increasingly vital role in their economic development. The region was strategically located along the Atlantic coastline and contributed significantly to the oil and gas sector, which indirectly stimulated the growth of related service industries, including hospitality businesses.

3.2 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised owners, operators, and employees of hotels and restaurants in the South-South region of Nigeria that had been in operation for not less than five years. The selection of hotels and restaurants as the study population was informed by their prominence and representativeness within the hospitality industry. The number of registered hotels and restaurants in the South-South region as of December 2024, obtained from the Uyo Branch of the Corporate Affairs Commission, was 23,373, as presented below.

3.2.1 Population Distribution of Hotels and Restaurants in the South-South Region

HOTELS/RESTAURANTS	POPULATION
Akwa Ibom	2640
Cross River	3300
Rivers	5610
Bayelsa	4105
Edo	2850
Delta	4868
TOTAL	**23373**

Source: Corporate Affairs Commission

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

The sample size for the study was statistically determined using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where

N = the finite population

n = Sample Size

e = Level of significance

N = 23,373

e = 0.05

Therefore;

$$n = \frac{23,373}{1+23,373(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{23,373}{1+23,373(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{23,373}{1+58.4325}$$

$$n = \frac{23,373}{59.4325}$$

$$n = 393$$

The sample size for the study was therefore 393 respondents.

3.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Samples for the study were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. At the first stage, the sampling frame was stratified into six strata: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, and Delta States. At the second stage, samples were proportionately selected from each stratum based on the determined sample size using a simple random sampling technique.

3.4.1 Sample Distribution Frame

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS	POPULATION	SAMPLES
Akwa Ibom	2640	44
Cross River	3300	56
Rivers	5610	94
Bayelsa	4105	69
Edo	2850	48
Delta	4868	82
Total	23,373	393

Source: Researcher's computation

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey research design was adopted for the study. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to describe, examine, record, analyze, and interpret the variables investigated. The approach was particularly suitable due to the relatively large population from which the data were collected.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process was structured around two major instruments: Focus Group Discussions and Structured Questionnaires.

3.6.1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS)

Focus groups were organized in each of the six states within the South-South region. Each group consisted of 8–10 participants drawn primarily from owners and senior managers of selected hospitality businesses. The discussions were facilitated by experienced moderators from the research team and were guided by a standardized discussion protocol to ensure consistency across sessions. The objective of the FGDs was to generate in-depth insights into how hospitality businesses conceptualized and implemented entrepreneurial orientation in their daily operations. Participants shared experiences, challenges, opportunities, and best practices. Key themes discussed included perceived benefits of entrepreneurial orientation, barriers to innovation, risk-taking and strategic decision-making, competitive strategies, and the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on customer retention and business growth. Discussions were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

3.6.2 STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES

Structured questionnaires were administered to employees and customers of selected hospitality businesses to complement qualitative data. The instrument was customized to align with the research objectives and context. It was divided into four sections: Demographics; Entrepreneurial Orientation; Business Performance; and Customer Perspective. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Data collection was conducted during official business hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to ensure respondent accessibility and alertness. To ensure efficiency and ethical compliance, selected businesses were pre-notified through formal letters and phone calls. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Within each establishment, respondents were selected randomly using a simple draw method to minimize bias. Field supervisors monitored data collection and ensured adherence to protocols.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

Data obtained from the focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic content analysis involving coding and categorization of recurring themes. NVivo software was utilized to manage and organize qualitative data. Quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation summarized the data, while inferential statistics including multiple regression models was employed to test hypotheses.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT DISCUSSION

A total of 393 questionnaires were distributed across the six states in the South-South region of Nigeria. Out of these, 372 were properly completed and returned, while 21 were either not returned or were invalid due to incomplete responses. This represents a response rate of 94.66% and a non-response rate of 5.34%. The high retrieval rate indicates strong participation and interest among respondents. Additionally, six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted (one per state) with an average of 9 participants per group, totaling 54 qualitative respondents. Accordingly, this led to the computation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents (see table 1).

Respondents Demographic Analysis (Quantitative Respondents)

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Quantitative Respondents (N = 1025)

Variable	Category	Freq. (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	201	54.03
	Female	171	45.97
Age	18–25	68	18.28
	26–35	129	34.68
	36–45	97	26.08
	46+	78	20.96
Marital Status	Single	143	38.44
	Married	196	52.69

	Others	33	8.87
Education	SSCE	59	15.86
	OND/NCE	102	27.42
	HND/BSc	149	40.05
	MSc+	62	16.67
Position	Owner	48	12.90
	Manager	86	23.12
	Employee	238	63.98
Experience	1–5 yrs	124	33.33
	6–10 yrs	137	36.83
	11+ yrs	111	29.84

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.1 indicates that 54.03% of respondents were male while 45.97% were female, showing relatively balanced gender participation. The majority (34.68%) were aged 26–35 years, followed by 36–45 years (26.08%), suggesting a youthful and economically active workforce. Married respondents constituted 52.69%, while 38.44% were single. Educationally, 40.05% possessed HND/BSc qualifications, indicating moderate to high literacy levels. Employees represented 63.98% of respondents, with managers (23.12%) and owners (12.90%) also participating. Regarding experience, 36.83% had 6–10 years of service, followed by 33.33% with 1–5 years, demonstrating adequate industry exposure.

Respondents Demographic Analysis (FGD Participants)

Table 4.2: Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Respondents (N = 18)

Variable	**Category**	**Freq. (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	31	57.41
	Female	23	42.59
Role	Owner	29	53.70
	Senior Manager	25	46.30
Experience	5–10 yrs	22	40.74
	11–15 yrs	18	33.33
	16+ yrs	14	25.93

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.2 presents the demographic profile of the 54 FGD participants. Male participants accounted for 57.41% while females represented 42.59%, indicating inclusive representation. A slight majority (53.70%) were business owners, while 46.30% were senior managers, ensuring strategic-level insights during discussions. In terms of industry experience, 40.74% had between 5–10 years of experience, 33.33% had 11–15 years, and 25.93% had over 16 years of experience.

Research Questions

Research question 1: What is the effect of students' safety orientation on their physical wellbeing in selected government owned tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State? In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Descriptive Analysis on Innovativeness of the Entrepreneur

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Our business frequently introduces new services and innovative offerings to attract customers.	128 (34.41%)	167 (44.89%)	39 (10.48%)	23 (6.18%)	15 (4.03%)	3.99	0.98
The entrepreneur supports creative ideas and experimentation to improve service delivery.	134 (36.02%)	171 (45.97%)	28 (7.53%)	24 (6.45%)	15 (4.03%)	4.03	0.96
Investment in new technology has significantly improved our operational efficiency.	119 (31.99%)	176 (47.31%)	32 (8.60%)	27 (7.26%)	18 (4.84%)	3.94	1.02
The entrepreneur encourages staff to suggest innovative ways to enhance customer satisfaction.	141 (37.90%)	162 (43.55%)	30 (8.06%)	25 (6.72%)	14 (3.76%)	4.05	0.95
Continuous product and service innovation has contributed to increased profitability and growth.	126 (33.87%)	182 (48.92%)	26 (6.99%)	22 (5.91%)	16 (4.30%)	4.02	0.97
Aggregate (Proportional Ratio)	**648 (34.84)**	**858 (46.13)**	**155 (8.33)**	**121 (6.51)**	**78 (4.19)**	**4.01**	**0.98**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.3 reveals that a majority of respondents agreed that innovativeness positively affects hospitality business growth. For item one, 167 (44.89%) agreed and 128 (34.41%) strongly agreed that new services are frequently introduced. On support for creativity, 171 (45.97%) agreed while 134 (36.02%) strongly agreed. Regarding technological investment, 176 (47.31%) agreed and 119 (31.99%) strongly agreed it improved efficiency. Staff encouragement toward innovation recorded 162 (43.55%) agreement and 141 (37.90%) strong agreement. Profitability impact showed the highest agreement with 182 (48.92%) agreeing and 126 (33.87%) strongly agreeing. Aggregate results indicate 858 (46.13%) agreed and 648 (34.84%) strongly agreed, giving a combined positive response of 80.97%. The grand mean of 4.01 confirms strong agreement.

To complement table analysis, the interviewed participants consistently emphasized the importance of innovation in sustaining growth. An owner in Rivers State stated: "*We constantly redesign our service packages and introduce new customer experience ideas to stay ahead of competitors.*" A senior manager in Akwa Ibom noted: "*Technology adoption, especially digital booking and online marketing, has increased our visibility and revenue significantly.*" From Delta State, a participant remarked: "*Encouraging staff to bring fresh* *ideas has improved customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.*" Similarly, an Edo-based hotel owner explained: "*Without innovation, especially in this competitive environment, survival becomes difficult.*" Across Bayelsa and Cross River States, respondents highlighted that innovation in menu design, event hosting, and facility upgrades directly influenced occupancy rates and profitability. Hence, the results reveals that entrepreneurial innovativeness significantly enhances growth, competitiveness, service quality, and profitability of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Research question 2: What is the effect of competitive aggressiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria? In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Descriptive Analysis on Competitive Aggressiveness of the Entrepreneur

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Our business responds quickly and aggressively to competitors' actions in the market.	122 (32.80%)	181 (48.66%)	29 (7.80%)	25 (6.72%)	15 (4.03%)	3.99	0.97
The entrepreneur adopts bold pricing and promotional strategies to outperform competitors.	130 (34.95%)	176 (47.31%)	27 (7.26%)	23 (6.18%)	16 (4.30%)	4.03	0.95
Our business actively monitors competitors to gain strategic advantage.	118 (31.72%)	184 (49.46%)	26 (6.99%)	28 (7.53%)	16 (4.30%)	3.97	1.01
The entrepreneur takes deliberate actions to secure and expand market share.	137 (36.83%)	169 (45.43%)	25 (6.72%)	24 (6.45%)	17 (4.57%)	4.03	0.98
Competitive strategies adopted have significantly improved business growth and customer base.	125 (33.60%)	183 (49.19%)	24 (6.45%)	23 (6.18%)	17 (4.57%)	4.01	0.96
Aggregate (Proportional Ratio)	**632 (33.98)**	**893 (48.01)**	**131 (7.04)**	**123 (6.61)**	**81 (4.36)**	**4.01**	**0.97**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.4 indicates that competitive aggressiveness positively influences hospitality business growth. For item one, 181 (48.66%) agreed and 122 (32.80%) strongly agreed that businesses respond aggressively to competitors. On bold pricing strategies, 176 (47.31%) agreed while 130 (34.95%) strongly agreed. Monitoring competitors recorded 184 (49.46%) agreement and 118 (31.72%) strong agreement. Regarding market expansion efforts, 169 (45.43%) agreed and 137 (36.83%) strongly agreed. Similarly, 183 (49.19%) agreed and 125 (33.60%) strongly agreed that competitive strategies improved growth. The aggregate results show that 893 (48.01%) agreed and 632 (33.98%) strongly agreed, totaling 81.99% positive responses. The grand mean of 4.01 and low standard deviation (0.97) indicate strong consensus.

To complement table analysis, the interviewed participants emphasized strategic competition as vital for survival and growth. A hotel owner in Delta State stated: "*In this region, if you are not aggressive with pricing and promotions, competitors will take your customers* *immediately.*" A senior manager in Rivers State noted: "*We constantly study what nearby hotels are offering and quickly adjust our services to remain ahead.*" From Cross River, a participant remarked: "*Seasonal discounts and targeted marketing campaigns have increased our occupancy rate significantly.*" An Edo-based respondent explained: "*Expanding our brand visibility through social media gave us an advantage over older competitors.*" However, across the discussions, respondents agreed that bold market positioning, strategic pricing, and proactive competitive responses directly drive customer growth, revenue expansion, and sustained business performance in the hospitality sector of the South-South region.

Research question 3: What is the effect of calculated risk taking of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria? In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Descriptive Analysis on Calculated Risk Taking

Items	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
The entrepreneur undertakes carefully evaluated financial risks to expand business operations.	129 (34.68%)	178 (47.85%)	26 (6.99%)	23 (6.18%)	16 (4.30%)	4.02	0.96
Major investment decisions are made after thorough analysis of potential gains and losses.	136 (36.56%)	170 (45.70%)	25 (6.72%)	24 (6.45%)	17 (4.57%)	4.03	0.98
The business is willing to commit resources to new opportunities despite uncertainty.	118 (31.72%)	182 (48.92%)	28 (7.53%)	27 (7.26%)	17 (4.57%)	3.96	1.01
Risk management strategies are implemented to minimize business losses.	141 (37.90%)	169 (45.43%)	24 (6.45%)	22 (5.91%)	16 (4.30%)	4.06	0.94
Taking calculated risks has contributed to improved profitability and long-term growth.	127 (34.14%)	184 (49.46%)	23 (6.18%)	21 (5.65%)	17 (4.57%)	4.03	0.95
Aggregate (Proportional Ratio)	**651 (35.00)**	**883 (47.47)**	**126 (6.77)**	**117 (6.29)**	**83 (4.47)**	**4.02**	**0.97**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.5 shows that calculated risk taking significantly influences hospitality business growth. For item one, 178 (47.85%) agreed and 129 (34.68%) strongly agreed that entrepreneurs undertake evaluated financial risks. On analytical investment decisions, 170 (45.70%) agreed and 136 (36.56%) strongly agreed. Willingness to commit resources despite uncertainty recorded 182 (48.92%) agreement and 118 (31.72%) strong agreement. Risk management implementation showed 169 (45.43%) agreement and 141 (37.90%) strong agreement. Profitability impact had 184 (49.46%) agreeing and 127 (34.14%) strongly agreeing. Aggregate results reveal 883 (47.47%) agreed and 651 (35.00%) strongly agreed, totaling 82.47% positive responses. The grand mean of 4.02 indicates strong consensus that calculated risk taking enhances profitability, sustainability, and expansion of hospitality businesses in South-South Nigeria.

To complement table analysis, the interviewed participants reveal that calculated risk taking plays a strategic role in business growth. A senior manager in Akwa Ibom State remarked: "*We invested in online booking systems despite uncertainty, but we analyzed the market trend before committing funds.*" An Edo-based hotel operator added: "*Taking risks is necessary, but we always weigh the cost implications and possible outcomes*." An owner in Rivers State stated: "*Before we expand or renovate, we conduct a proper financial feasibility study to know the likely returns*." From Delta State, a participant noted: "*Every major decision is backed by projected cash flow analysis and customer demand patterns.*" However, participants in Bayelsa and Cross River States emphasized that controlled borrowing, phased expansion, and diversification of services (such as event hosting and catering) significantly improved profitability.

Research question 4: What is the effect of proactiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria? In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Descriptive Analysis on Proactiveness

Items	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
The entrepreneur anticipates future market trends and prepares the business accordingly.	132 (35.48%)	176 (47.31%)	27 (7.26%)	22 (5.91%)	15 (4.03%)	4.04	0.95
The business initiates actions ahead of competitors to exploit emerging opportunities.	139 (37.37%)	168 (45.16%)	25 (6.72%)	23 (6.18%)	17 (4.57%)	4.05	0.97
New products and services are introduced before competitors react to market changes.	121 (32.53%)	183 (49.19%)	26 (6.99%)	25 (6.72%)	17 (4.57%)	3.99	0.99
The entrepreneur actively seeks new market opportunities for expansion.	145 (38.98%)	167 (44.89%)	23 (6.18%)	21 (5.65%)	16 (4.30%)	4.07	0.93
Proactive strategies adopted have enhanced long-term business growth and stability.	128 (34.41%)	185 (49.73%)	22 (5.91%)	20 (5.38%)	17 (4.57%)	4.04	0.94
Aggregate (Proportional Ratio)	**665 (35.75)**	**879 (47.26)**	**123 (6.61)**	**111 (5.97)**	**82 (4.41)**	**4.04**	**0.96**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.6 indicates that proactiveness significantly affects hospitality business growth. For anticipation of market trends, 176 (47.31%) agreed and 132 (35.48%) strongly agreed. Initiating actions ahead of competitors recorded 168 (45.16%) agreement and 139 (37.37%) strong agreement. Early introduction of services showed 183 (49.19%) agreement and 121 (32.53%) strong agreement. Seeking new markets had 167 (44.89%) agreeing and 145 (38.98%) strongly agreeing. On long-term growth impact, 185 (49.73%) agreed and 128 (34.41%) strongly agreed. Aggregate results reveal 879 (47.26%) agreed and 665 (35.75%)

strongly agreed, totaling 83.01% positive responses. The grand mean of 4.04 indicates very strong consensus that proactiveness enhances competitiveness, expansion, and sustainability of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

To complement table analysis, the interviewed participants consistently reported anticipating customer needs and market changes before competitors. From Edo State, a participant explained: "*We don't wait for competitors to act; we launch promotions and new services based on forecasted demand.*" A hotel owner in Cross River State stated: "*We introduced weekend entertainment packages before others thought about it, and that boosted our occupancy rate.*" A senior manager in Delta State commented: "*We monitor tourism trends and adjust our services ahead of peak seasons to maximize revenue.*" In Rivers State, an operator added: "*Proactive marketing on social media helped us attract younger customers early.*" Therefore, participants across Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa States emphasized early adoption of digital marketing, staff training, and facility upgrades as proactive measures that improved customer retention and brand visibility.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The null hypothesis states that there is no significant effect of innovativeness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria. In order to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was performed on the data (table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Regression Analysis of Innovativeness on Business Growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.768	0.590	0.589	0.48271	0.590

Table b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	182.764	1	182.764		
Residual	128.416	370	0.347	784.326	0.000
Total	311.180	371			

Table c: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-cal	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.284	0.214	—	6.000	0.000
Innovativeness	0.742	0.027	0.768	28.006	0.000

****Significant at 0.05 level; df = 370; N = 372; Critical r-value = 0.098**
a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Hospitality Businesses
b. Predictor: Innovativeness

Table 4.7 shows that innovativeness has a strong positive effect on business growth (R = 0.768), which is far greater than the critical r-value of 0.098. The R^2 value of 0.590 indicates that 59.0% of variations in hospitality business growth are explained by innovativeness. The

F-statistic (784.326, p = 0.000) confirms that the model is statistically significant. The standardized Beta (0.768) and t-calculated value (28.006) further indicate a strong positive effect. Since the calculated r-value (0.768) is greater than the critical r-value (0.098) and $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, innovativeness significantly influences the growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant effect of competitive aggressiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria. In order to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was performed on the data (table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Regression Analysis of Competitive Aggressiveness on Business Growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.741	0.549	0.548	0.50312	0.549

Table b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	170.853	1	170.853		
Residual	140.327	370	0.379	673.412	0.000
Total	311.180	371			

Table c: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-cal	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.196	0.229	—	5.224	0.000
Competitive Aggressiveness	0.701	0.027	0.741	25.951	0.000

****Significant at 0.05 level; df = 370; N = 372; Critical r-value = 0.098**
a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Hospitality Businesses
b. Predictor: Competitive Aggressiveness

Table 4.8 reveals a strong positive effect competitive aggressiveness on business growth (R = 0.741), which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.098. The R^2 of 0.549 shows that 54.9% of the variation in growth is explained by competitive aggressiveness. The F-value (673.412, p = 0.000) indicates statistical significance. The Beta coefficient (0.741) and t-calculated (25.951) confirm a significant positive effect. Since the calculated r-value (0.741) is greater than the critical r-value (0.098) and the significance level is below 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Competitive aggressiveness significantly enhances market share, customer acquisition, and growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant effect of calculated risk taking of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria. In order to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was performed on the data (table 4.9).

Table 4.9: Regression Analysis of Calculated Risk Taking on Business Growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.783	0.613	0.612	0.47120	0.613

Table b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	190.734	1	190.734		
Residual	120.446	370	0.326	828.516	0.000
Total	311.180	371			

Table c: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-cal	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.102	0.208	—	5.298	0.000
Calculated Risk Taking	0.769	0.027	0.783	28.789	0.000

****Significant at 0.05 level; df = 370; N = 372; Critical r-value = 0.098**
a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Hospitality Businesses
b. Predictor: Calculated Risk Taking

Table 4.9 indicates a very strong positive effect of calculated risk taking on business growth ($R = 0.783$), exceeding the critical r-value of 0.098. The R^2 of 0.613 shows that 61.3% of growth variation is explained by calculated risk taking. The F-statistic (828.516, $p = 0.000$) confirms model significance. The standardized Beta (0.783) and t-value (28.789) further indicate a strong effect. Since the calculated r-value (0.783) is greater than the critical r-value (0.098) and $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, calculated risk taking significantly contributes to profitability, expansion, and sustainable growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant effect of proactiveness of the entrepreneur on the growth of hospitality businesses in south-south region of Nigeria. In order to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was performed on the data (table 4.10).

Table 4.10: Regression Analysis of Proactiveness on Business Growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.812	0.659	0.658	0.43862	0.659

Table b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	205.041	1	205.041		
Residual	106.139	370	0.287	933.874	0.000
Total	311.180	371			

Table c: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-cal	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.015	0.201	—	5.049	0.000
Proactiveness	0.804	0.026	0.812	30.574	0.000

****Significant at 0.05 level; df = 370; N = 372; Critical r-value = 0.098**
a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Hospitality Businesses
b. Predictor: Calculated Risk Taking

Table 4.10 reveals a very strong positive effect of proactiveness on hospitality business growth (R = 0.812), which is substantially higher than the critical r-value of 0.098. The R^2 value of 0.659 indicates that 65.9% of growth variation is explained by proactiveness. The F-value (933.874, p = 0.000) confirms statistical significance. The standardized Beta (0.812) and t-calculated value (30.574) show a very strong positive effect. Since the calculated r-value (0.812) exceeds the critical r-value (0.098) and the significance level is below 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, proactiveness significantly enhances competitiveness, market expansion, customer retention, and overall growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Innovativeness and Business Growth

The findings of this study revealed that innovativeness has a strong and statistically significant effect on the growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria. Descriptive results showed that 167 respondents (44.89%) agreed and 128 respondents (34.41%) strongly agreed that their businesses frequently introduce new services, while 182 (48.92%) agreed and 126 (33.87%) strongly agreed that innovation contributed to profitability. Aggregate responses indicated 858 (46.13%) agreed and 648 (34.84%) strongly agreed, confirming strong positive perception. Regression analysis further produced R = 0.768, which is far greater than the critical r-value of 0.098, with $R^2 = 0.590$ and F = 784.326 ($p < 0.05$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. This aligns with the theoretical foundation of Schumpeter (1934), who emphasized innovation as the engine of firm growth. It also supports Miller (1983) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), who identified innovativeness as a core dimension of entrepreneurial orientation (EO). Empirically, the findings are consistent with Afolabi (2020), Ali et al. (2021), Victor et al. (2022), Uduak and Emmanuel (2021), Eze et al. (2020), and Rosenbusch et al. (2011), all of whom found positive relationships between innovation and firm performance in hospitality and SME contexts. The result equally corroborates Rauch et al. (2009) and Wiklund and Shepherd (2005), who reported that innovativeness significantly enhances competitive advantage and business expansion. Thus, innovation-driven strategies significantly explain hospitality growth in the region.

Competitive Aggressiveness and Business Growth

The study found that competitive aggressiveness significantly influences hospitality business growth. Descriptive analysis revealed that 181 respondents (48.66%) agreed and 122 (32.80%) strongly agreed that their firms respond aggressively to competitors. Additionally, 184 (49.46%) agreed that competitor monitoring improves performance. Aggregate responses showed 893 (48.01%) agreed and 632 (33.98%) strongly agreed, indicating strong consensus. Regression results yielded $R = 0.741$, which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.098, with $R^2 = 0.549$ and $F = 673.412$ ($p < 0.05$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. This supports the Entrepreneurial Orientation theory of Covin and Lumpkin (2011), which posits that competitive aggressiveness strengthens firm positioning. It also aligns with strategic management theory (Chathoth & Olsen, 2019) emphasizing proactive competition. Empirically, the findings agree with Ibrahim and Shariff (2016), Egberi (2023), Onyeizugbe et al. (2020), Okeke et al. (2022), Daniel and Chukwuemeka (2023), and Kraus et al. (2012), who found competitive strategies positively linked to SME growth. Furthermore, Keh et al. (2007) established that market-oriented aggressiveness enhances firm performance. In Nigeria's highly competitive hospitality sector, these findings confirm that bold pricing, promotion, and market positioning significantly drive growth.

Calculated Risk Taking and Business Growth

The findings indicate that calculated risk taking has a very strong and significant effect on hospitality business growth. Descriptively, 184 respondents (49.46%) agreed and 127 (34.14%) strongly agreed that calculated risks improved profitability, while aggregate responses showed 883 (47.47%) agreed and 651 (35.00%) strongly agreed. Regression analysis produced $R = 0.783$, greater than the critical r-value of 0.098, with $R^2 = 0.613$ and $F = 828.516$ ($p < 0.05$), confirming statistical significance. This result aligns with the classical entrepreneurship theory of Schumpeter (1934) and Penrose (1959), which highlight risk-bearing as central to firm growth. It also supports Lumpkin and Dess (1996) and Kreiser et al. (2013), who identified risk-taking as a determinant of performance. Empirical studies by Akpan and Akpan (2022), Muazu et al. (2023), Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2020), Uchenna and Osemene (2021), Wiklund and Shepherd (2005), and Rauch et al. (2009) similarly reported positive effects of risk orientation on SME performance. In the South-South region, where environmental uncertainty exists (World Bank, 2022), calculated risk taking enables expansion, diversification, and improved financial returns. Therefore, the study strongly confirms theoretical and empirical expectations that strategic risk management enhances sustainable hospitality growth.

Proactiveness and Business Growth

The study established that proactiveness exerts the strongest effect on hospitality business growth. Descriptive findings showed that 185 respondents (49.73%) agreed and 128 (34.41%) strongly agreed that proactive strategies enhanced long-term growth. Aggregate responses recorded 879 (47.26%) agreed and 665 (35.75%) strongly agreed. Regression results revealed R = 0.812, which is significantly higher than the critical r-value of 0.098, with $R^2 = 0.659$ and F = 933.874 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that 65.9% of growth variation is explained by proactiveness, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The result strongly supports Miller (1983) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), who conceptualized proactiveness as anticipating and acting on future opportunities. It also aligns with Covin and Wales (2019) and Daft (2010), who emphasized forward-looking strategic behavior. Empirical support is found in Eze and Ogbonna (2021), Obi and Igwe (2022), Kraus et al. (2012), Eze et al. (2020), Radojevic et al. (2018), and Kandampully et al. (2020), who observed that proactive firms outperform reactive ones. In Nigeria's evolving hospitality market (PwC, 2019; BTM Limited, 2024), proactiveness enhances competitiveness, customer loyalty, and sustained expansion.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have significant theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. Theoretically, the results reinforce the Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) framework advanced by Miller (1983) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), confirming that innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, calculated risk taking, and proactiveness are critical determinants of firm growth. The strong r-values obtained across all hypotheses indicate that EO dimensions remain highly relevant within emerging economies and particularly within Nigeria's hospitality sector. This extends EO theory to the South-South geopolitical context and enriches African-based empirical literature. Managerially, the study provides practical guidance for hospitality entrepreneurs and managers. The strong effects of proactiveness (R = 0.812) and calculated risk taking (R = 0.783) suggest that forward-looking strategies and informed investment decisions are essential for sustaining profitability and competitiveness. Managers should therefore prioritize innovation systems, competitive intelligence, and structured risk assessment mechanisms. The findings also imply that businesses that continuously introduce new services and respond strategically to competition are more likely to experience improved occupancy rates, customer loyalty, and revenue growth. From a policy perspective, government agencies and tourism development bodies should design entrepreneurship development programs that strengthen EO competencies among hospitality operators. Capacity-building initiatives, innovation grants, and digital transformation support can stimulate sectoral growth. Financial institutions may also use the findings to design tailored funding products that encourage calculated risk taking among credible hospitality entrepreneurs. Overall, the study provides evidence-based insights capable of enhancing the performance and sustainability of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth of hospitality businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria. Using a sample size of 372 quantitative respondents and 54 qualitative participants, the study adopted a survey research design supported by focus group discussions. Descriptive and regression analyses were employed to test four hypotheses relating to innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, calculated risk taking, and proactiveness. The findings revealed that all four dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation have significant positive effects on hospitality business growth. Innovativeness recorded a strong effect (R = 0.768), competitive aggressiveness showed a substantial influence (R = 0.741), calculated risk taking demonstrated a very strong relationship (R = 0.783), while proactiveness emerged as the strongest predictor (R = 0.812). The high R^2 values across models further confirmed that these entrepreneurial traits explain a considerable proportion of variations in business growth. The null hypotheses were therefore rejected in all cases. The study concludes that entrepreneurial orientation is a fundamental driver of competitiveness, sustainability, and expansion within the hospitality sector. In the dynamic and resource-rich environment of the South-South region, hospitality businesses that embrace innovation, act proactively, compete strategically, and take calculated risks are more likely to achieve long-term success. The integration of qualitative insights further validated the quantitative findings, demonstrating practical alignment between entrepreneurial behavior and performance outcomes.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Entrepreneurs should institutionalize innovation practices, including service redesign, digital marketing adoption, and technology integration, to sustain competitive advantage and profitability.

2. Government and Tourism Development Agencies (NTDC and State Ministries of Tourism) should organize capacity-building programs to train hospitality operators in entrepreneurial orientation skills, especially in proactive market analysis and strategic risk management.

3. Financial institutions should provide flexible financing schemes and low-interest credit facilities to hospitality businesses that demonstrate structured risk-taking and innovation-driven expansion plans.

4. Business associations and chambers of commerce should facilitate regular industry benchmarking forums and competitive intelligence workshops to enhance competitive aggressiveness and collaborative growth strategies.

5. Academic institutions and researchers should be strengthened with entrepreneurship education and practical incubation programs tailored to hospitality management to cultivate proactive and innovative future entrepreneurs.

Limitations, Validity, and Credibility

The study was limited to hospitality businesses operating for at least five years within the South-South region, which may restrict generalization to newer firms or other regions of Nigeria. Data relied partly on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias. However, methodological triangulation through questionnaires and focus group discussions enhanced validity. The high response rate (94.66%) and statistically significant regression results strengthen reliability and credibility. Established measurement scales and rigorous statistical procedures further ensured internal consistency and analytical accuracy.

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