



Entrepreneurial Orientation, Opportunities and Eco-Tourism Development in Bayelsa State: A Strategic Perspective

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of entrepreneurial orientation in promoting ecotourism development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial skills: - risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, customer/ecus, creativity, and pro activeness and their influence on the long-term growth of eco-tourism firms in the region. The study explains how these entrepreneurial elements might contribute to Bayelsa State's economic, social, and environmental growth by conducting a thorough examination of current literature and empirical data. The findings show that a strong entrepreneurial focus considerably improves the performance and feasibility of eco-tourism ventures. Entrepreneurs with a risk-taking mindset can seek undiscovered prospects in eco-tourism development, whereas competitive aggressiveness motivates them to differentiate their services and attract tourists in a competitive market landscape. Furthermore, a customer-focused strategy promotes visitor happiness and loyalty, which leads to repeat visits and favorable word-of-mouth. Also, creativity emerges as a vital aspect in developing distinctive eco-tourism experiences, which boosts tourist engagement and the destination's appeal. Pro activeness helps entrepreneurs to foresee market trends, adjust to changing environmental conditions, and quickly capitalize on new possibilities. Finally, creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bayelsa State has the potential to stimulate eco-tourism development while also driving economic growth, supporting environmental protection, and improving community well-being. To fully capitalize on entrepreneurial ability, authorities must prioritize enabling infrastructure, financial access, skill development, capacity-building initiatives and stakeholder participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is described as traveling to and staying in locations outside than one's typical surroundings for pleasure, business, or other non-paid activities (World Tourism Organization, 2010). Tourism comprises a variety of travel-related activities, services, and sectors, including transportation, housing, food, shopping, entertainment, activity facilities, and hospitality services (Parks and Recreation Management 2012) Tourism a multifaceted concept, which stands as a beacon of economic and social prosperity for regions worldwide. At its core, it encompasses the travel and exploration undertaken by individuals to destinations outside their usual environment for leisure, recreation, or business purposes (WTO, 2019). Tourism is a

major source of income and foreign exchange earner for countries with tourism potentials. Though the significance of tourism lies not only in its economic contributions but also in its ability to foster cultural exchange, promote understanding among diverse communities, and preserve natural and cultural heritage (Hall, (2010).

Within the vast scope of tourism, eco-tourism emerges as a niche sector characterized by its commitment to environmental sustainability and conservation (Honey. 2008). Unlike conventional forms of tourism, eco-tourism prioritizes responsible travel practices that minimize negative impacts on natural ecosystems and local communities while maximizing positive outcomes (Weaver. 2008). its emphasis on preserving biodiversity, protecting fragile ecosystems, and promoting community engagement underscores its pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals {Buckley. 2012). Eco-tourism is rapidly expanding, particularly in developing nations with sufficient resources (Magigi and Ramadhani. 2013). Without a doubt, tourism is now the world's largest industry. While individuals go on leisure trips, the impact of their travels has resulted in infrastructure improvement, physical development, job possibilities, and the addition of value to locally undervalued resources. The harmful nature of mass tourism and the irritating loudness of urban tourism have caused people to grow more interested in ecotourism.

The rise of capitalism has led to the commodification of formerly free resources, requiring tourists to pay for their experiences (Ijeomah and Herbert, 2012). Tourist payments have led to significant investment in ecotourism. with many parties keen to reap the advantages. Ecotourism may help alleviate poverty and promote national development with adequate management and monitoring. To attract tourists, states in Nigeria with strong tourism potential often create artificial attractions, such as zoos. Tourists like to observe nature and culture in their pristine form. In this context, the strategic infusion of entrepreneurial orientation into eco-tourism development assumes paramount importance, especially in regions like Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a strategic mindset characterized by a proactive and innovative approach to identifying and capturing opportunities (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001). In the context of ecotourism development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, encouraging entrepreneurial orientation has the potential to drive long-term growth and optimize socioeconomic benefits. EO helps tourism stakeholders to envision and profit from Bayelsa's untapped natural resources, such as pristine mangrove forests, diverse wildlife, and picturesque rivers (Gberevbie, 2013). Tourism enterprises that value entrepreneurial skills such as risk-taking, ingenuity, and adaptability may lead to programs that encourage environmental conservation and community engagement (Shane 2003). Furthermore, EO promotes an innovative and collaborative culture, enabling the co-creation of unique eco-tourism experiences that resonate with tourists while protecting Bayelsa's ecosystems (Morris et al. 2008). This strategic perspective enables tourism entrepreneurs to capitalize, on new trends such as sustainable travel practices, experiential tourism, and digital marketing to boost Bayelsa's competitiveness and appeal as an eco-tourism destination (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).

Entrepreneurial Orientation the formation of strong collaborations between government agencies, local communities, and private sector organizations, hence creating a favorable environment for eco-tourism investment and infrastructure development (Wales et al, 2013). Stakeholders can overcome hurdles to eco-tourism expansion by exploiting synergies and pooling resources, such as poor infrastructure, restricted funding access, and regulatory challenges (Hall, 2010).

Entrepreneurial orientation can act as a catalyst for unlocking the full potential of eco-tourism in Bayelsa State, by empowering stakeholders to create value, promote innovation, and achieve sustainable development goals that will benefit both the environment and local populations.

With its rich natural endowment comprising lush mangrove forests, diverse wildlife, and pristine waterways, Bayelsa holds immense potential for eco-tourism (Gberevbie, 2013). However, unlocking this potential necessitates a proactive entrepreneurial mindset that capitalizes on emerging opportunities, fosters innovation, and navigates the complexities of the tourism industry (Shane. 2003).

3. Problem Statement

Against the above backdrop that the problem statement arises: Despite its inherent ecological and socio-economic value, eco-tourism in Bayelsa State remains underdeveloped, lacking strategic direction and entrepreneurial vigor. This gap not only impedes the harnessing of the state's tourism potential but also hinders its ability to contribute effectively to sustainable development efforts at both local and national levels.

4. Objective of the study

The objective of this paper presentation is twofold: firstly, to explore the nexus between entrepreneurial orientation and eco-tourism development in Bayelsa State, and secondly, to propose strategic interventions and policy recommendations aimed at fostering a conducive ecosystem for sustainable eco-tourism growth in the region.

5. Eco-tourism Development Opportunities and Advantages in Bayelsa State.

The concept of eco-tourism revolves around sustainable travel practices. In recent decades, eco-tourism has gained significant attention as a responsible alternative to conventional mass tourism, driven by growing concerns about environmental degradation and cultural erosion. Scholars have extensively discussed the principles and characteristics of eco-tourism, emphasizing its triple-bottom-line approach, which aims to balance environmental conservation, socio-cultural benefits, and economic viability (Fennell. 2014). This approach underscores the importance of minimizing negative impacts on ecosystems and local communities while maximizing positive outcomes for both.

Bayelsa, a state in Nigeria, holds immense potential for eco-tourism development due to its rich natural resources and cultural heritage. Located in the heart of the Niger Delta region, Bayelsa boasts diverse ecosystems, including mangrove forests, freshwater swamps, and pristine beaches, which are home to a plethora of flora and fauna, some of which are endemic to the region (Ogbalor. 2018). Moreover, Bayelsa's vibrant cultural traditions, characterized by colorful festivals, traditional dances, and indigenous crafts, offer unique experiences for tourists seeking authentic encounters with local communities. However, despite its tourism potential

infrastructural challenges, environmental degradation, and socio-political instability, lack of investment by policy-makers, lack of investment incentives like public private partnership agreements have mitigated its potentials (Ebi. 2019).

The development of eco-tourism in Bayelsa presents numerous advantages and opportunities for the state's sustainable growth and development. Firstly, eco-tourism has the potential to diversify Bayelsa's economy, reducing its heavy dependence on oil revenues and creating alternative sources of income for local communities (Osabohien et al., 2020). By promoting small-scale enterprises such as eco-lodges, guided tours, and community-based initiatives, eco-tourism can stimulate economic growth at the grassroots level, empowering marginalized populations and fostering inclusive development. Additionally, eco-tourism can contribute to environmental conservation efforts by raising awareness about the value of natural resources and incentivizing their protection through ecologically responsible practices (Buckley. 2009). Through sustainable tourism planning and management strategies. Bayelsa can preserve its fragile ecosystems while simultaneously enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

Moreover, the development of eco-tourism in Bayelsa presents unique opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between tourists and local communities. By engaging visitors in immersive experiences such as cultural workshops, homestays. and participatory activities. Bayelsa can showcase its rich cultural heritage and traditions, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation (Dallen & Boyd. 2017). This cultural exchange not only enriches the travel experience for tourists but also promotes social cohesion and tolerance within the community, leading to greater cultural appreciation and respect. Additionally, eco-tourism can serve as a platform for indigenous communities to assert their rights to land, resources, and self-determination, empowering them to actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods (Scheyvens, 2002). By recognizing and respecting indigenous knowledge systems and practices. Bayelsa can promote a more equitable and inclusive approach to tourism development, ensuring that local communities benefit directly from their involvement in the industry.

The concept of eco-tourism embodies a holistic approach to tourism development that prioritizes environmental conservation, socio-cultural preservation, and economic empowerment. In the context of Bayelsa, eco-tourism holds immense potential for sustainable development, offering opportunities to diversify the economy, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and empower local communities.

However, realizing this potential requires concerted efforts from stakeholders at all levels, including government agencies, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and local communities. By adopting a collaborative and participatory approach to eco-tourism development, Bayelsa can harness its unique resources and strengths to create a more resilient and inclusive tourism industry that benefits both present and future generations.

6. The Need for Entrepreneurial Orientation in Developing Eco-Tourism in Bayelsa State

Scholars have widely acknowledged that entrepreneurial orientation encompasses a set of strategic behaviors that drive firms towards innovation, risk-taking, and proactive decision-making (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011). This orientation proves instrumental in the tourism sector,

where the ability to identify and capitalize on opportunities, adapt to changing market trends, and create unique experiences is essential (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001).

In the specific context Eco-tourism development, researchers emphasize the role of entrepreneurial orientation in facilitating the sustainable management of natural resources and cultural heritage (Miller & Fadahunsi, 2020). Bayelsa State, with its rich biodiversity, mangrove forests, and traditional cultures, presents ample opportunities for [£®-tourism ventures. However, realizing this potential requires a proactive approach that aligns with the principles of EO.

Studies underscore the importance of entrepreneurial orientation in overcoming the challenges typically associated with tourism development in emerging economies, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and regulatory constraints (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). In the case of Bayelsa State, where infrastructural deficiencies and bureaucratic hurdles have hindered tourism growth, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among stakeholders becomes indispensable. Moreover, scholars emphasize the role of EO in fostering collaboration and partnership among various actors in the tourism value chain (Gretzel et al., 2015). In Bayelsa State, where community involvement and local empowerment are pivotal for sustainable tourism development, fostering an entrepreneurial orientation can catalyze inclusive growth and equitable distribution of benefits.

Research furthermore highlights the need for capacity building and skill development to enhance entrepreneurial orientation among tourism stakeholders (Tkaczynski et al., 2019). In the context of Bayelsa State, investing in education, training, and knowledge transfer initiatives can empower local communities and entrepreneurs to leverage EO for Eco-tourism development effectively.

Literature underscores the critical role of entrepreneurial orientation in driving eco-tourism development in Bayelsa State, by fostering innovation, risk-taking, collaboration, and capacity building, an entrepreneurial mindset can unlock the latent potential of the state's natural and cultural assets, leading to sustainable economic growth and socio-cultural enrichment.

7. Reviving the Eco-tourism Sites in Bayelsa through Entrepreneurial Mindset Adoption

Bayelsa State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, boasts significant potential for eco-tourism due to its rich biodiversity and natural landscapes. Despite this potential, several areas remain underdeveloped, presenting opportunities for entrepreneurial initiatives to revive them.

One underdeveloped eco-tourism potential lies in the mangrove forests of Bayelsa State. These mangroves are vital ecosystems, home to diverse flora and fauna, including rare species such as the West African manatee and various bird species. However, the current condition of these mangroves is often marred by pollution from oil spills and illegal activities such as logging and fishing, leading to degradation of the ecosystem (Oyeyiola et al, 2018).

Entrepreneurial orientation dimensions such as innovation and risk-taking can play a crucial role in reviving mangrove eco-tourism in Bayelsa State. Innovative approaches could involve the introduction of sustainable tourism practices, such as guided boat tours that educate visitors

about the importance of mangrove conservation while minimizing environmental impact. Risk-taking entrepreneurs could invest in rehabilitation efforts for degraded mangrove areas, partnering with local communities and conservation organizations to restore these vital ecosystems. Another underdeveloped eco-tourism potential lies in the state's riverine communities. These communities offer unique cultural experiences, with traditional practices, arts, and festivals that showcase the rich heritage of the Niger Delta region. However, limited infrastructure and lack of exposure hinder the growth of tourism in these areas (Izibili & Salome, 2017).

Entrepreneurial orientation dimensions such as proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness can help revive eco-tourism in riverine communities. Proactive entrepreneurs can identify opportunities to develop infrastructure, such as eco-lodges or cultural centers, that cater to tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. Competitive aggressiveness can drive entrepreneurs to market these destinations effectively, leveraging digital platforms and partnerships with travel agencies to attract visitors. Furthermore, the state's pristine beaches along the Atlantic coastline present untapped eco-tourism potential. These beaches offer opportunities for activities such as swimming, snorkelling, and beachcombing, yet their development for tourism purposes has been minimal due to challenges such as inadequate facilities and security concerns (Olofinnade et al, 2017).

Entrepreneurial orientation dimensions such as autonomy and pro-activeness can drive the development of beach eco-tourism in Bayelsa State. Autonomous entrepreneurs can take the initiative to invest in beachfront properties and amenities, offering visitors a comfortable and safe environment to enjoy coastal activities. Proactive entrepreneurs can collaborate with local authorities to address security challenges, implementing measures to ensure the safety of tourists and the sustainability of the coastal environment.

Bayelsa State harbors several underdeveloped eco-tourism potentials, including mangrove forests, riverine communities, and pristine beaches. By leveraging entrepreneurial orientation dimensions such as innovation, risk-taking, pro activeness. and competitive aggressiveness, entrepreneurs can play a pivotal role in reviving these areas, unlocking their economic and environmental benefits for both local communities and visitors alike.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the potential of eco-tourism in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, is vast and promising, given its rich natural resources, cultural heritage, and untapped destinations. However, realizing this potential requires a strategic approach that integrates entrepreneurial orientation into eco-tourism development initiatives. Entrepreneurial orientation encompasses proactive, innovative, and risk-taking behaviors essential for identifying opportunities, overcoming challenges, and creating sustainable tourism ventures.

Recommendations for Practice

1. **Promote Innovation:** Stakeholders involved in eco-tourism development should encourage innovative approaches to create unique and sustainable experiences for tourists. This may involve introducing new tour packages, eco-friendly accommodations, or cultural immersion activities that showcase Bayelsa's diverse offerings.

2. **Invest in Infrastructure:** To enhance the appeal of eco-tourism destinations, there should be concerted efforts to invest in infrastructure development, including transportation, accommodations, and recreational facilities. This will improve accessibility and the overall visitor experience.
3. **Empower Local Communities:** Engage and empower local communities by involving them in decision-making processes, capacity-building initiatives, and revenue-sharing schemes. This ensures that communities benefit directly from eco-tourism activities and fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship over natural and cultural resources.
4. **Implement Sustainable Practices:** Emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism practices to minimize negative environmental impacts and preserve Bayelsa's ecosystems for future generations. This includes waste management, energy conservation, and biodiversity conservation efforts.

Recommendations for Government

1. **Policy Support:** Government should enact policies and regulations that promote eco-tourism development while ensuring environmental conservation and socio-cultural preservation. This may involve providing incentives for eco-friendly businesses, streamlining permit processes, and enforcing sustainable tourism standards.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Allocate resources for infrastructure development in eco-tourism areas, including roads, utilities, and visitor facilities. Public-private partnerships can be explored to leverage additional funding and expertise for infrastructure projects.
3. **Capacity Building:** Invest in education and training programs to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of local communities and tourism stakeholders. This includes training in hospitality, tour guiding, sustainable resource management, and marketing.
4. **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop marketing campaigns to promote Bayelsa as an eco-tourism destination both domestically and internationally. This may involve partnerships with travel agencies, participation in tourism fairs, and leveraging digital platforms for promotion.

By adopting these recommendations, both practitioners and government authorities can work collaboratively to unlock the full potential of eco-tourism in Bayelsa State, contributing to sustainable economic development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation.

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