

## Knowledge and Attitude of SME Leaders and Stakeholders on Sustainability of Tourism Industry in Lagos State, Nigeria

Akinmusuyi Akintunde

Lund University, Lund, Sweden

**Abstract:** The contribution of tourism industries to economic and human development cannot be relegated to the background due to monetary benefits and attraction of tourists. The study adopted institutional theory for the justification of the inquiry with extant reviews of publications based on the research questions. Qualitative method was adopted with exploratory research designs for the collection of verbal information from participants from LinkedIn and Google Meet Calls. Thirty (30) participants were selected for the interviews with the use of semistructure instrument. Ten (10) participants consented willing and participate in the research inquiry due to informed consent and other ethical factors adhered to before the research was conducted. The study finds out that adequate knowledge and awareness of sustainability is required in the area of tourism growth and development in Lagos tourism sector. It is concluded that lack of adequate knowledge and poor enlightenment activities on sustainability and tourism development influence poor state of development and growth in the tourism development. It is therefore, recommended that adequate knowledge of institutional knowledge influence economic, cultural and environmental preservation. Also, proactive measure is needed around environmental conservation standard and practices.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Knowledge, SME, Sustainability, Tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

Evidence gathered from the submission of the past and present scholars indicated that tourism play a significant role toward the growth and development of many nations globally. (Naseem, 2021; Gössling & Scott, 2015). Despite the positive advantages associated with tourism which offers economic benefits, preservation of cultural heritage, environmental conservation, and community empowerment (Gössling & Scott, 2015; Tunde, 2012; Ogunmefun & Okunneye, 2020). In another dimension, Odeyemi et al, (2024) observed and described the gravity of challenges faced by the tourism industries which include environmental issues and unethical practices that negate the growth and development of the sector which need evolutionary reforms to meet the global expectations for the sustainability of tourism industries (Babu & Suthari, 2024).

According to Gupta et al (2024), maintaining sustainable tourism is one of the environmental challenges currently facing countries in the global south. More so, sustainable tourism is not merely a preference; its adoption and implementation (Tourism) ensure long-term vitality for cultural preservation and economic benefits. Also, sustainable tourism is based on a number of fundamental principles that illustrate why the industry (sustainable tourism) remains one of the vital futuristic opportunity to support economic development in any nations (Tourism). Tunde (2012) avers that one of the fundamental tenets of sustainable tourism is the conservation of natural resources which entails the implementation of

environmentally conscious practices with the objective of reducing carbon footprints and safeguarding biodiversity.

In addition Sharpley & Telfer, (2015) explains the relevance of sustainable tourism stating that the concept (tourism) guarantees natural attractions and generate economic benefits for communities. The above submission was supported by Sigala, (2020) & Wani *et al.*, (2022) when they explains that the distribution of economic advantages associated with tourism is to ensure equitable involvement of local businesses, promote fair wages, and support community initiatives. The growth and development of tourism industries will ameliorate human livelihoods and empowerment within any communities in Nigeria.,

Nigeria, is one of Africa's most dynamic and populated cities, with a flourishing tourism industry (Hamukoma *et al.*, 2019). with diverse cultures and rich history for the potential development of tourism industry. Despite these abundant resources, the tourism industry in Nigeria is confronted with a number of challenges that negate its growth and sustainability (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2018; Ogunmefun, 2022). The challenges ranges from inadequate infrastructure, insecurity and poor sustainable practices within the industry (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2018; Ogunmefun et al, 2025). The importance of sustainable tourism development cannot be relegated to the background in any countries because tourism industries in Nigeria is characterize by presence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). , In

addition, Nwokonie & Adeniyi (2021), explains that tourism include a diverse range of hospitality and service providers, to include hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and other related businesses.. These enterprises are of vital importance in the delivery of personalized and diverse tourism experiences, contributing significantly to the local economy and enhancing the social fabric of the communities in question (Nwokorie & Adeniyi, 2021).

This paper, therefore, aims to explore the role of SMEs in driving sustainable tourism development in Lagos State, Nigeria. The outcome of the study tends to contribute towards the theoretical and practical significance by providing positive policy formulation and add to existing knowledge of tourism growth and development in Lagos State, Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory adopted for the study is anchored on the use of Institutional theory which explains how organisations conform to or resist societal norms and expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983.). Institutional theory is rooted to the scholarly works of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), institutional theory posits that SMEs, must either resist or conform to societal norms and expectations. More so, the theory explain the similarity, variety in organizational practices which causes organizations within an industry to become very much like each others in the practices and structures they have as time passes (Scott, 2014).

The fundamental tenets of Institutional theory was anchored on broader principles which determine how organizations are embedded within broader institutional contexts, which are

- Institution act as governance and structures that uses social rules and control individual behaviour
- Those who conform to those rules are given legitimacy
- Institution tend to be inert and resist change
- When change does happen past structures and rules influences new institutional arrangements

The above core fundamental assumptions was supported in Yuga & Anas, (2021) when they explains that institutions encompasses formal rules (e.g. laws and regulations) and informal norms, (beliefs, and cultural values) that guide organisational behaviour. They also explains that institutional pressure emanate from diverse sources

such as governments, professional bodies, industry associations, and societal expectations affect the growth and development of tourism industries globally.. In accordance with the trending philosophy of today's organisations are observed not just as production institution but also culturally and socially in-client Furthermore, an institution is externally by public opinion.

n relation to SMEs in Lagos' tourism sector, institutional theory provides a critical know how entrepreneurial might approach sustainable tourism practices due to extensive information of the industry.. Many SMEs in Lagos may not prioritize sustainability due to lack of awareness, or limited resources. For instance, SMEs in Lagos might adopt sustainable practices by imitating successful models within the tourism industry. Institutional theory provides relevant insights into how institutions shape behaviours, norms, and practices within organisations and society (Yuga & Anas, 2021; Eitrem *et al.*, 2024; Ociti, 2023; Mohammed, 2017).

Evidence gathered from the review of institutional theory explains how the theory faces significant criticisms, in relation to the difficulty in calculating institutional variables, which negate the application and effectiveness of the theory (Institutional) The above mentioned challenges are exacerbated by the diversity of organisations and the influence of dominant groups. This lack of clarity hinders a thorough understanding and application of the theory

Despite the criticisms levelled against institutional theory, it remains beneficial for understanding the dynamics of organisations and societies, particularly in the context of this study on SMEs in sustainable tourism development in Lagos. The theory provides a effective know how toward analyzing how SMEs engage with and influence institutional environments, thereby playing crucial roles in driving sustainable tourism development in Lagos

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was conducted in Lagos state precisely among SME's leaders and other sustainable stakeholders in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative method and exploratory research design to explore the knowledge and attitude of SME's and relevant stakeholders in the tourism sector in Lagos state, Nigeria. Thirty (30) participants were selected through the use of snowballing technique for the

identification and recruitment of SME;s and stake holders representatives respectively from LinkedIn and Google meet calls based on the job descriptions of the selected participants through referral. In-depth Interviews were slated among thirty (30) selected participants. Out of the selected thirty (30) participants ten (10) granted permission to the researcher to conducted interviews. Out of the ten (10) interviews conducted six (6) were conducted directly among SME;s Representative while Four (4) out of the ten (10) were sustainable stakeholders from the tourism sector using semistructured interviews. All ethical approval were obtainable from the participants online before the interviews were conducted. The ethical condition include observed informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The data collected from the participants through qualitative method and the use of in-depth interviews were analysed using the content systematic method of data analysis and interpretations based on the research themes established to guide the outcome of the research inquiry.

## RESULTS

The result of this study is divided along two sections. The first section is anchored on the explanation of the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants while the second section is central on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the participants through Google Meets calls and Zoom. Thirty (30) participants were selected but Ten (10) participants consented to participate in the interviews.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants were analysed as follows; 5(50.0%) of the participants were Christians, 3(30.0%) were Muslims while 2(20.0%) of the participants were recorded under others specify categories which include Huddism, Buddhism and traditional worshipping. The age distribution analysis deciphers that 4(40.0%) of the participants were within the age bracket of 31years to 40 years, 3(30.0%) were within 41years to 50 years, 2(20.0%) were within the ages of 51years and above while 1(10.0%) of them were recorded under less than 30 years as at the time the research was conducted. 6(60.0%) of the participants were from Yoruba ethnic group, 3(30.0%) were from Igbo ethnic group while 1(10.0%) were from Hausa/Fulani ethnic group The sex distribution frequencies shows that 7(70.0%) of the participants were male participants while 3(30.0%) of them were female participants.

The second part of the result were presented according to the analytical framework illustrated by the statements made by participants from two different participants (SME;s and Stake Holders representatives;

- SR” is assigned to SME Representatives, and
- 2) OSS” stands for Other Sustainability Stakeholders.

The research question intends to understanding and knowledge of SME’s in driving sustainable tourism development in Lagos State, Nigeria The research question framed for the study intends to inquire into how SR and OSS in Lagos State, Nigeria, drive sustainability in the tourism industry.

The first response was derived from SR knowledge of sustainability on the growth and development of tourism industry analyzed and interpreted as follows

*“Just little knowledge about it [sustainable tourism], it is talked about now, trying to make the environment safe and all, butt hasn’t been a focus in our business yet. As I mentioned, business is a small operation, a boat tour company. Our primary concern is ensuring that our boats are well maintained and ready for our customers to enjoy their cruises. IDI/SR1/Zoom Call/13 April, 2025”*

This outcome of the result gathered from participants deciphers that there are no strong coercive pressures from, Lagos government regulations policy(cies)) mandating sustainability, nor normative pressures on tourism industry standards.

Another interview conducted with SR2 demonstrate limited awareness of the need to maintain tourism without causing significant harm and lack detailed knowledge of sustainable practices. The participant posited that

*“Maybe to some extent uh, or maybe we already adopt some of its principles indirectly, I can’t say. Even though we want to make sure tourists keep coming back and patronise us, enjoying the beauty of Lagos, without destroying things too*

*much from our community. You get? So I really don't know.*

*IDI/SR5/Google Call/28 April, 2025”*

The outcome of the submission collected from the In-depth interview conducted shows that lack of proper awareness of the sustainability of tourism growth and development affected the industry in Lagos. For example the SR2 submitted that they understand business continuity rather than sustainability principles in the tourism industry. The findings corroborate with Scott (2014) This stating that normative pressure affect the knowledge of sustainable initiatives within the industry compared with business continuity,

The view of another participant was central around economic viability rather than environmental sustainability. SR3's perspective,

*“ it's mostly about, um, keeping the tourism industry alive*

*and, uh, profitable, you know?,*

*IDI/OSS/Zoom Call/30, April, 2025”*

The outcome of the interview collected and interpreted shows that the normative pressures within the industry are often based on economic sustainability over broader sustainable practices. This lack of awareness about sustainable tourism also suggests minimal engagement with sustainability stakeholders. This shows that either the stakeholders are not vocal about sustainability issues, or their influence is not strong enough to impact the business practices of OSS;s 1

Despite the lack of understanding demonstrated by these SRs 1 and 2 regarding sustainable tourism, a few SRs, such as SR3 and SR4, posited that proper understanding of the concept in relation to their respective businesses influence the growth and development of the tourism industry. SR3 – who is the owner and head chef of a restaurant in Lagos, for example, posited that:

*“Hmmm that's interesting (pauses) because I have been*

*reading up on that recently. You know. That is where the*

*world is moving to. From what I gather, it is all about*

*making sure that we can keep enjoying this beautiful city and*

*its attractions without messing stuff up for future generations,*

*right. You know, like finding a42 balance between bringing in*

*visitors and not harming the environment or losing our local culture along the way. It's about taking care of what*

*we have so that we can keep sharing it with others in the long*

*run. You know, something like that.*

*IDI/SME/Google meets/Stakholder/30, April, 2025”*

The result of level of awareness gathered from SR3's shows that the level of awareness of sustainable tourism indicates exposure to normative pressures from global sustainability trends and industry standards. The representative mentions actively reading about sustainable tourism, reflecting a proactive approach to adapting to emerging norms. Information collected from another OSS 2 posited that :

*“Well, sustainable tourism, hmm, it's like, you know, when*

*tourism, um, doesn't harm the environment and, uh, helps*

*local communities. I think it's about balancing, you know,*

*the needs of tourists with protecting the natural and cultural*

*resources. Like, making sure we use resources wisely and, uh,*

*maybe giving back to the community. Yeah, that's how I see*

*it.*

*IDI/OSS 2/ZoomCall/30 April, 2025”*

The response gathered from OSS2 explains that the understanding of sustainable tourism suggests a response to both mimetic and normative pressures. The focus on balancing tourist needs with environmental and cultural protection practices within the tourism industry. This perspective highlights the importance of community engagement and resource conservation and aligns with Freeman et al.'s (2010) emphasis on the role of businesses in contributing to the welfare of their communities and the environment.

For instance, OSS3, representing the Lagos State Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, emphasises the importance of sustainable tourism in balancing economic benefits with cultural and natural preservation:

*“Here at the Ministry, this idea of sustainable tourism,*

*right, goes beyond just attracting visitors ehmm to our*

*beautiful places and sites in Lagos. It's uhmm about making*

*sure that our tourism activities does not only benefit our economy but also, it must protect our culture, our natural heritage, you know, for future generations. (pauses) You see we want to promote tourism that will, ehmm does not harm the environment or make local communities vulnerable but will enhance their well-being and support local businesses. That's how we see sustainable tourism, here at our ministry IDI/Tourism Rep/ Lagos State Ministry/10 April, 2025/."*

This response indicates a clear understanding of sustainable tourism, influenced by institutional pressures to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental preservation (Scott, 2014). The Ministry's role in promoting sustainability aligns with coercive and normative pressures, where government policies and standards enforce sustainable practices. The statement, *we want to promote tourism that will not harm the environment or make local communities vulnerable but will enhance their well-being and support local businesses*, shows the Ministry's effort to balance the interests of various stakeholders to achieve long-term sustainability in Lagos' tourism sector (Freeman, 1984).

Another interview conducted with OSS2, a representative of an NGO that focuses on urban environmental conservation, emphasized proactive measures to enhance sustainability, driven by normative pressures from environmental conservation standards and practices, stating that:

*"To us, sustainable tourism is about minimizing the negative environmental impacts of tourism while maximizing its potential to support conservation and community development. IDI/SME/Zoom/ NGO Rep/Lagos/10 April, 2025"*

This perspective aligns with DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) idea of normative isomorphism, where organisations adopt practices that align with industry standards and values promoting sustainability. This analysis reveals a significant disparity in comprehension and engagement with sustainability principles, particularly among SRs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Many SMEs exhibit a limited

understanding of sustainable tourism, primarily focusing on economic aspects such as profitability and customer satisfaction. This indicates weak coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures within Lagos' tourism industry to enforce comprehensive sustainable practices. These SMEs prioritise economic stakeholders, such as customers, while neglecting environmental and social stakeholders. This limited stakeholder engagement hinders the integration of comprehensive sustainability practices in Lagos' tourism sector.

The responses from many SMEs indicate that the existing institutional support for sustainable tourism in Lagos is inadequate and poorly communicated. The insights from this analysis suggest a pressing need for stronger institutional mechanisms and targeted education to enhance the understanding and practice of sustainable tourism in Lagos.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The outcome of the research explain the importance of the knowledge of sustainability in the growth and development of tourism industry in Lagos State, Nigeria. The result gathered from the participants interviewed shows that while some SME;s Rep concluded that the knowledge of tourism industry promote cultural herital and add to economic benefit, others posited that the lack of knowledge of sustainability affect the growth and development of toursim industry (Rubinstein, 2024). The outcome of the inquiry was supported and corroborates with the findings of scholarly works of some scholars. For example Khokhobaia (2019),opines that SMEs play an important role in the development of economy,because it constitutes the powerful engine for the national and regional economic activities.Likewise Jacinto & Du Preez (2018 opines that SMEs are well-positioned to promote local products and services, fostering economic development within the tourism industry (Benneh, 2025). The result shows that the entrepreneurial are major sources of income generation, technological innovation, which enhances the process of transferring new knowledge to the industry and society (A-Clottey, 2025).

The outcome was also supported by Khokhobai, (2019). stating that SMEs in sustainable tourism development presents opportunities for capacity building and skills transfer within local communities, enhances the capabilities of local entrepreneurs and contributes to the overall

sustainability of the tourism sector (Ratnayake, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the knowledge of sustainability in the tourism sectors in Lagos state stem to present opportunities for capacity building of local and international entrepreneurial and contribute to the overall sustainability of tourist sectors in Nigeria The study deciphers that the knowledge of sustainability pressure affects the trends and pattern of tourism growth and development among the local entrepreneurial . Finally, the study concluded that sustainable tourism influences institutional pressure to balance economic , cultural and environmental preservation

## Recommendations

It is on this wise that the following recommendations were enacted

- 1.The stakeholders and SME;s should have extensive information and adequate training an sustainable practices, processes and techniques to advance tourism growth and development of the sustainability
- 2.Ministry of Tourism in Lagos State and Nigeria should create additional opportunities and training on awareness of sustainability in the tourism industries in Lagos State, Nigeria.
- 3.Proactive measure for the enhancement of sustainability driven by normative pressure should be encourage by the environmentalists
- 4.Environmental conservation standard and practices should be encourage as standards practices by all tourism growth and development.
- 5.Tourism stake holders, NGO and Officials of Ministry of Tourism should collective;y developed strategic and proactive policies to ameliorate the growth and development of Tourism industry.

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