

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH NATIONAL PARKS IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study assessed the impact of infrastructure on customer satisfaction with tourism destinations in North-East Nigeria.

Methodology: The study is a survey where a sample size of 242 tourists who spent at least one night in each of the three destinations was used for the study. The statistical analysis was carried out using the statistical software SPSS v.17. The questions were analyzed using a descriptive statistics and simple linear regression

Findings: It was found out that infrastructure has significant impact on the customer satisfaction in their various destinations. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that, infrastructure does not have significant impact on tourists' satisfaction with their destinations in North-East Nigeria was rejected indicating that infrastructure was found to have significant impact on customer satisfaction with tourists' destinations in North-East Nigeria. Infrastructural facilities especially good roads, hotel rooms and catering services were found to be the key in enhancing customer satisfaction with the National Parks of North-East Nigeria. For the National Parks of North-East Nigeria to flourish as tourism destinations therefore all the States and Local Governments including the organized private sector in the region should all join hand in the provision of infrastructure in these parks.

Original value: Academics and practitioners have not adequately researched the role of infrastructure on customer satisfaction with national parks in north east Nigeria. The relevance of tourism is, therefore, yet to be fully exploited in Nigeria's development strategies and plan formulations. This research covered this gap.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, national parks, tourism destinations, eco-tourism, north-eastern Nigeria

Paper type: Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Customers are becoming the absolute entity for corporations as the final decision makers for business deals and purchases of products. It is in this direction that Yu (2005) opines that business corporations must make efforts to create and provide their customers with higher value added, which consists of elements such as lower prices, additional benefits, and uniqueness in services therefore the National Parks are no exception. The potentials of

national parks as tourism destinations on the socio-economic and cultural development of communities have been reckoned by scholars in the past (Weaver, 1999; Koens *et al*, 2009).

In Africa, several researches on exploring the potentials of their natural assets as an ecotourism resort have been documented (Mbaiwa, 2002; Appeal, 2008), while in Nigeria, only few studies have examined the potentials of ecotourism (Bankole and Gbadebo, 2006).

The objective of this paper is to determine the impact of infrastructure on customer satisfaction with the National parks in North East Nigeria. For Nigeria to cope with the increasing competition in the tourism sector it has to focus on improving its infrastructure. Nigeria is blessed with so many attractive travel destinations that improving its infrastructure can lead to customer satisfaction hence improved patronage and a source of revenue generation, job creation and overall economic growth. Tourism sector can contribute maximally to the national economy as a major export earner like the petroleum and the agricultural sectors.

The study assesses the impact of infrastructure as it enhances the tourists' satisfaction in their choice for National Parks in the North-East. The choice of national parks in North-East Nigeria as an area of study becomes necessary because of their importance among the parks in Nigeria. Other reasons are proximity to enable an in-depth study of the area and long history as some of the oldest parks in the country. These National Parks located in this region are well known Parks in Nigeria and are also rich in ethno-historical and archaeological attractions which have made them one of the most important tourists' destinations in Nigeria.

The choice of North-East Nigeria becomes necessary because of their vintage position as the leading region in terms of endowments with the parks. There are eight (8) National Parks in Nigeria (1) Chad Basin (2) Cross River (3) Gashaka Gumti (4) Kainji Lake (5) Old Oyo (6) Yankari (7) Okomu and (8) Komoku (Aremu 2007), out of which (3) Chad Basin, Gashaka Gumti and Yankari are in the North-East region.

Apart from these three many other important areas of tourism do exist in the region which include, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Tomb, the Mambila Plateau, Koma Hills, Goza Hills, Lake Chad Basin, Tsuma Park and so on. No study on marketing aspect has been conducted on these National Parks that are being selected for this study to the best of my knowledge.

Customer Satisfaction

One of the biggest challenges for managers in the tourism industry is to provide and sustain customer satisfaction. Customer requirements for quality products and service in the tourism industry have become increasingly evident to any that wants to remain in business. The consumer's satisfaction is a consequence of the purchasing activities, of the consumption and of the use of some goods and services and defines both as an emotional answer, and a cognitive answer.

Customer satisfaction is a business philosophy which aims at creation of value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations, and demonstrating ability and responsibility to satisfy their needs. Quality of service and customer satisfaction is critical factors for success of any business (Gronoos, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1988). As Valdani (2009) points out: enterprises exist because they have a customer to serve. The key to achieve sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers (Shemwell *et al*, 1998). Service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention.

Customer satisfaction is the outcome of customer's perception of the value received in a transaction or relationship, where value equals perceived service quality, compared to the value expected from transactions or relationships with competing vendors (Blanchard &

Galloway, 1994; Heskett *et al.*, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). In order to achieve customer satisfaction, it is important to recognize and to anticipate customers' needs and to be able to satisfy them. Enterprises which are able to understand and satisfy customers' needs, make greater profits than those which fail to understand and satisfy them. Since the cost of attracting new customers is higher than the cost of retaining the existing ones, in order to be successful managers must concentrate on retaining existing customers implementing effective policies of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The success of any organization depends on defining the consumers' needs and desires in the targeted markets and meeting such needs and desires in a manner more effective than the competitors. Therefore, organizations in the tourism sector must meet these needs and desires to acquire the highest market share, the highest profitability, and tourists' satisfaction.

Problems of infrastructure

Most countries have experienced how tourism and related recreational activities have helped to increase and diversify their economic bases, particularly in rural areas (Fawson, Thimany, and Keith 1998). A study conducted by Slee, Farr, and Showdowns (2007) has also documented that tourism has direct, indirect or an induced impact on economic development. In fact, the industry is one of the most crucial tradable sectors in the world. According to Essien, (2008) the role of tourism in national economic development is enormous. The only economic strategy remaining for the country to enhance its revenue base is tourism. She noted that the problems militating against the sector are man-made, one of which is the development of strategic infrastructure.

Some analysts such as Runsewe (2009) agreed with Essien and call for an urgent need to address security concerns, epileptic power supply, poor state of roads and unreliable public

transportation system. They also opined that there is the need to tackle poor public sanitation in most towns and cities. Clifford, (2010) agreed that poor infrastructure in the country are hampering the development of tourism. Most of the country's rural infrastructure, he observed, are inadequate, thus making tourism sites located outside the cities not only expensive to reach but also risky. These deter some visitors and corporate bodies from developing and maintaining tourism sites in the country. Obi, (2010) called for partnership among stakeholders to overcome the hiccups facing the tourism sector. While accepting that government cannot do it alone, he pointed out that it is important for the industry to consciously encourage partnership in order to optimise its potential. By partnership, both the stakeholders and the artists will have a clearer picture of the needs of the sector and areas that need to be developed.

Empirical Related Studies

Lache and Trifu (2011) reported that Customer's satisfaction is vital for the tourism companies. Light, (1996) reported most visitors were satisfied with the cultural/heritage destination. This satisfaction leads tourists to expand the length of stay and visit it again. Emma & Anette, (2008) showed that international tourism affects the social community in many ways, both positive and negative. Okech & Mwagona, (2007) found out that Poverty, famine, HIV/AIDS are national disasters in Kenya. Awaritefe, (2004) research in Nigeria showed that the most prominent motivations for tourist destination choice are self-actualization in an appreciative, educational or cultural context and leisure/recreational pursuits. Ova, (2003) investigation reveals that globally, tourism has become a sustainable revenue earner competing favorably with the manufacturing sector, especially in the developed countries. Dantata, (2011) concludes that tourism if developed will add value to the national economy through job creation, foreign exchange generation hence solving most social, economic and political problems. Ashikodi, (2012) show that inadequate

infrastructure and lack of maintenances of Nigerian transport system and monumental structure are some of the constraints and challenges confronting tourism development in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the survey method. Specifically, the study adopted the analytical survey method. According to Yalams & Ndomi, (2000) the analytical survey considers the entire population or representative of the population known as the sample. This design was used because information was elicited from the respondents (tourists) and analyzed.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all visitors that spent a night or more in the various destinations under investigation. This included both national and international tourists. The population of Nigerian and non-Nigerian tourists that visited and spent at least one night in the 3 destinations between 1stDecember 2010 to 31st February 2012 which was 1837 thus (Yankari 1,251 Lake Chad 280 Gashaka Gumti 306).This figures were obtained from the Admin/personel Officers of the three Parks with the permissions of their superior officers. The low patronage was attributed to the insecurity situation in Nigeria and particularly the North- East zone.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

In determining the sample size for the study Yamane (1967:886) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes for known population which was used for determining the sample size which was 328.

Method and Instrument of Data Collection

Data for the study was obtained by administering 328 structured questionnaires to the

sampled tourists and two hundred and eighty two (282) were duly collected of which two hundred and forty-two[242] were usable as forty [40] were removed for mopidity or were found to be outliers in the process of data transformation.

Validation of the Instrument

Content validity refers to the subjective agreement among professionals that a scale logically appears to reflect accurately what it purports to measure (Sigmund, 2000). Therefore, in this study, content validity was strengthened through an extensive review of the literature and six senior managers, two each from the three destinations validated the instrument for face and content validation. The senior managers actually checked typographical errors, mechanics or style of writing and appropriateness of each of the sub-sections in addressing the various variables under investigation.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability can be thought of as consistency in measurement. To establish the reliability of the tourists' satisfaction measurement used in the survey instrument, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) was 0.74

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RESULTS

Table 1 Mean responses of respondents on the impact of infrastructural facilities on their satisfaction with the National Parks in North-East Nigeria

S/No	Items	f(%) of Respondents	X̄	STD	Remarks
1	Roads to and within destination are accessible	SA 64(26.4) A 110(45.5) UD 44(18.2) D 23(9.5) SD 1 (0.4)	3.88	.923	Agreed
2	Destination has adequate sporting facilities	SA 62 (25.6) A 106 (43.8) UD 49 (20.2) D 21 (8.7) SD 4 (1.7)	3.83	.964	Agreed
3	Power supply is adequate within the destination	SA 61(25.2) A 112(46.3) UD 52(21.5) D 16 (6.6) SD 1(0.4)	3.89	0.872	Agreed
4	Hotel room facilities are adequate.	SA 70(28.9) A 102(26.8) UD 60(24.8) D 9 (3.7) SD 1(0.4)	3.95	0.851	Agreed
5	Restaurant and catering services are satisfactory	SA 69(28.5) A 107(44.2) UD 45(18.6) D 19 (7.9) SD 1(0.8)	3.92	0.925	Agreed
6	Destination has adequate water supply	SA 64(26.4) A 93(38.4) UD 46(19.0) D 37 (15.3) SD 2(0.8)	3.74	1.039	Agreed

Sources: Field survey, December 2011- February 2012

Key

\bar{X} = mean

STD= Standard Deviation

F(%)=Frequency/Percentage of respondents.

Table 1 Shows the impact of infrastructural facilities on the customer satisfaction with their various destinations which revealed that all the six (6) items have a mean of above 3.50. This shows that all the respondents agreed with the items provided on the impact of infrastructural facilities on their satisfaction with the destinations. There were six items under this construct, the first statement was on the ease of accessibility within the destinations where agreed has the highest frequency of 110(45.5%) respondents followed by strongly agreed with the frequency of 64(26.4), undecided 44(18.2), disagreed 23(9.5%) and strongly disagreed 1(0.4%). On the adequacy of sporting facilities agreed has the highest frequency of 106(43.8%) followed by strongly agreed 62(25.6%), undecided 49(20.2%), disagreed 21(8.7%) and 4(1.7%) strongly disagreed. As for the influence of power supply agreed has the highest frequency of 112(46.3%) followed by strongly agreed with the frequency of 61(25.2%), undecided 52(21.5%), disagreed 16(6.6%) and 1(0.4%) strongly disagreed. For adequacy of hotel rooms, agreed has the highest frequency of 102(42.1%) followed by strongly agreed with the frequency of 70(28.9%), undecided 60(24.8%), disagreed 9(3.7%) and only 1(0.4%) strongly disagreed. For satisfactory restaurants and catering services agreed also the highest frequency of 107(44.2%), followed by strongly agreed with the frequency of 69(28.5%), neutral 45(18.6%), disagreed 19(7.9%) and 2(0.8%) strongly disagreed. And lastly on the adequacy of water supply agreed also has the highest frequency of 93(38.4%) followed by strongly agreed with the frequency of 64(26.4%), undecided 46(19.0%), disagreed 37(15.3%) and 2(0.8%) strongly disagreed.

The hypothesis is tested in table 2

H₀: Infrastructural facilities have no significant impact on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in the North East Zone of Nigeria.

H₁ Infrastructural facilities have significant impact on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in the North East zone of Nigeria.

To test the hypothesis using simple linear regression the response data was transformed into mean averages for each of the two constructs used in this analysis with infrastructure as the independent variable and customer satisfaction as the dependent variable. Based on the above, the proceeding analysis provides the detailed procedure for the test of hypothesis using regression.

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Table 2 Model summary, ANOVA, and Coefficient results on the impact of infrastructure on customer satisfaction with National Parks

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of estimate	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Std. coefficient		Unstd. coefficient	
										B	Std. Error	Beta	T
ANOVA	.640 ^a	.410	.407	.30639	15.642	1	15.642	166.636	.000 ^a				
					22.529	240	.094						
					38.172	241							
Coefficient										1.961	0.158		12.407 0.00
										0.523	0.041	0.640	12.909 0.00

a. Predictor: (Constant), INFRASTRUCTURE

b. Dependent Variable: OVERALL SATISFACTION

Table 2 is concerned with the impact of infrastructural facilities on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in North East Nigeria and the null hypothesis, which states that infrastructural facilities have no significant impact on Customer satisfaction with the National Parks in North East zone of Nigeria.

In order to further reveal support for the hypothesis, the infrastructural facilities' impact on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in the North East zone of Nigeria, regression procedure was employed because it provided the most accurate interpretation of the independent variable (Infrastructural facilities). The independent variable was expressed in terms of the standardized scores (beta coefficients). The significant factors that remained in the regression equation were shown in order of importance based on the beta coefficients. The dependent variable, tourists' satisfaction, was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale and was used as a substitute indicator of tourists' evaluation of their satisfaction with the Destinations.

The table shows the results of the regression analysis. To predict the goodness-of-fit of the regression model, the regression coefficient (R), coefficient of determination (R^2), and F ratio were examined. First, the R of independent variable (infrastructure, X_1) on the dependent variable (tourists' level of satisfaction, or TOS) is 0.640, which showed that the tourists had positive and high satisfaction levels with infrastructural facilities. Second, the R^2 is 0.410, suggesting that more than 40% of the variation of tourist' satisfaction was explained by this factor. Last, the F ratio, which explained whether the results of the regression model could have occurred by chance, had a value of 166.636 ($P < 0.001$) and was considered significant. The regression model achieved a satisfactory level of goodness-of-fit in predicting the

variance of tourists' satisfaction in relation to infrastructural facilities, as measured by the above –mentioned R , R^2 , and F ratio.

In the regression analysis, the beta coefficient was used to explain the relative importance of infrastructural facilities (independent variables) in contributing to the variance in tourists' satisfaction with the destinations (dependent variable). As for the relative importance of the infrastructural facilities, $B_1=0.523$, ($P<0.001$). The results showed that a one-unit increase in infrastructural facility would lead to a 0.523 unit increase in tourists' level of satisfaction with their destinations, other variables being held constant.

In summary, infrastructural facilities have significant impact on tourists' satisfaction with the destination. Thus, the results of regression analysis rejects the null hypothesis which states that infrastructural facilities have no significant impact on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in the North East zone of Nigeria.

Discussions of Findings

Based on the objective which was set to determine the impact of infrastructural facilities on Customer satisfaction with National Parks in north east zone of Nigeria, and the null hypothesis(H_0) which states that Infrastructural facilities have no significant impact on Customer satisfaction with the National Parks in in the North East zone of Nigeria was rejected.

This implies that infrastructure is central to tourism marketing in North-East Nigeria. For tourism products to be produced and consumed the basic infrastructure has to be put in place

no matter how rich their natural resources and unique cultural heritage. This is in line with the opinion of Runsewe, (2009) who suggested that the Nigerian government has to focus on infrastructure development in order to boost its tourism industry as it is regarded as the key to advancing the tourism industry in Nigeria. He went further to affirm that Government would ensure that the provision of basic infrastructural facilities, namely, good roads, water, electricity, communications and hotels, to centers of attraction, in order to accelerate their development for the purpose of exploiting fully their touristic value. It equally important to note that tourists are highly sensitive to political instability which could threaten their personal safety and security (Sharpley and Adams. 1996). So apart from developing the physical tourism infrastructure, political stability must be cultivated as an important factor in influencing tourism. Therefore, for tourism potentials in Nigeria to be utilized sustainably, the necessary infrastructures and enabling environment and information on tourism which will attract tourists must be available. Enabling environment in this case refers to all the parameters required to make a complete tour, such as good roads, functional telecommunications good accommodation and adequate security.

Information on the existence of attractions sites and these infrastructures must be available to tourists and the general public this means that raw data on tourist sites and infrastructures has to be gathered, processed, structured, then stored and organized in such a way it is easily retrieved. Government therefore should urgently tackle the problem of infrastructure development and maintenance. These include electricity, water, IT facilities and efficient transportation system which have considerable positive impact on tourism operations. All the National Parks in North East are managed and operated by the Government Federal or State. There is need for the government to provide some appropriate incentives in order to encourage private institutions to actively participate for private sector participation(PSP) is said to be the engine house of tourism industry.

The North-East region of Nigeria can become a prominent tourist destination if tourism planners and developers in the region carry out a further research on the needs of tourism in the region in order to maximize the benefit of tourism. They should harness the needs of the stake holders with those of tourists and the local communities they operate.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Like all such studies, implications drawn from the study were subject to several limitations first, there was no good cooperation from some of the tourists who felt that the filing of the questionnaire was intervening with their time for relaxation and other activities even though the questionnaires were distributed to tourist who spent at least one night and above.

There was the problem of insecurity in the country particularly the North-East zone towards end of the data collection which is the study area of this study. This negatively affected the turnout of the tourists. For example there were the problem of Kalare and the Sara Suka (political thugs) in Gombe and Bauchi and the insurrection of the Boko Haram fundamentalists in Borno, which later spread to parts of Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi, and Adamawa states. Apart from infrastructure there are many other variables that have impact on customer satisfaction such as service quality, price, managerial and general staff attitude, and products quality. Research can be conducted in such areas to gain more insights to the factors influencing customers satisfaction in National parks of North-East Nigeria.

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APPENDIX

Please Tick Appropriate responses or fill in the blank spaces provided.

1. Age

- 11 – 30 ()
- 31 – 50 ()
- 51 – 70 ()
- Above 70 ()

2. Gender

- Male ()
- Female ()

3. Nationality

- Nigerian ()
- Foreigners ()

4. Indicate how long it took you to this Destination

- Days ()
- Hours ()
- Minutes ()
- Others ()

5. Indicate the current destination visited

- Yankari ()
- Gashaka Gumti ()
- Chad Basin ()

6. How long did you stay in this destination?

- 1 Day ()
- 2-3 Days ()
- 4-7 Days ()
- 8-30 Days ()
- Others ()

7. How many times have you been to this destination?

- Once ()
- 2-3 times ()
- 4-5 times ()
- Others ()

8. Indicate other tourist destination you have visited in the North East Zgone of Nigeria.

- Yankari ()
- Gashaka Gumti ()
- Lake Chad ()
- Others ()

9. With whom did you visit the destination?

- Family ()
- Friends ()
- Colleagues ()
- Others Specify ()

Key Words; SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

UD= Undecided

DA= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

S/N	Part B: Infrastructural Facility	SA	A	UD	DA	SD
1	Roads to and within the destination are easily assessable.					
2	The destination has adequate sporting facilities.					
3	Power supply is quite adequate within the destination.					
4	Hotel Rooms facilities are adequate.					
5	Restaurant/catering services are quite satisfactory.					
6	The destination has sufficient and adequate water supply.					