

Assessing Tourism Potentials for Rebranding Nigeria: A Study of Gurara Waterfalls, Niger State

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Abstract

Tourism has become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. In Nigeria it is centered largely on events, due to the country's ample amount of ethnic groups, but also includes rainforests, savannah, waterfalls, and other natural attractions. Gurara Waterfalls is one of these tourism sites located in Niger State, Nigeria and it has enormous potentials that can be harnessed for tourism development. This research carried out an assessment on the tourism potentials of Gurara Waterfalls, through identification and analysis of its features and surrounding environment. Interviews, site analysis checklist, observation and Questionnaires were used as primary sources of data collection, and Niger state ministry of lands and housing, internet, google earth technology and Niger state culture and tourism corporation were the sources of secondary data collection. Results shows that Land allocated by Niger State Government for the development of Gurara Waterfalls is 1,105 hectares. The Area is characterized with thick Forest, Animals, combination of undulating and flat topography. The Waterfall is at its peak during the months of June to October in rainy season when the water covers the whole cliff and off-peak period of the Fall is between the month of October and May in dry season. Down the Fall span about 200 metres and a depth of about 50 metres, there are no organized recreational, facilities and services or activity present at the Fall, and some management challenges such as unavailability of tourists' statistics. SWOT analysis conducted showed that the Location has numerous Strengths, Weaknesses that can be controlled and the Opportunities outweighs the threats making the site a viable location for development of tourism destination. It is recommended if tourism potential can be fully identified and utilized; it can boost Niger State economy and Nigeria.

Keywords:

Economic,
Environment,
Housing tourism,
Waterfall

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Background to the Study

Tourism is the totality of the phenomenon arising from the travel and stay of strangers, as long as the stay does not imply the establishment of a permanent residence for the Purpose of Leisure, Business and entertainment (Bhatia, 2002). Tourism is a very potent driver of economic growth and employment creation all over the world. The Sector of Tourism is accountable for 8.8 percent of the world's Jobs (258 million jobs); 9.1 percent of the World's GDP (US\$6 trillion); 5.8 percent of the world's export (US\$1.1 trillion); and 4.5 percent of the World's investment (US\$652 billion) (Iain, et al., 2013). In Nigeria, Tourism is centered mainly on events as a result of the Country's large number of various ethnic groups, however also include rainforests, waterfalls, savannah and various natural attractions, however, the industry suffers unfortunately due to the country's poor infrastructure such as; roads, electricity, and potable water (Maurice, 2004).

Gurara Waterfalls holds the potential to become a world-class Tourist destination by virtue of its pleasant weather, beautiful sceneries, and conducive vegetation; and can be conceivably developed to the standard of the Niagra Falls, and Victoria Falls. These have remained potentials and not harnessed. An access road, a hut and an observation spot are the only developments existing at the falls over the years till present.

Nigeria is a country in quest of economic diversification from Crude Oil to maximize employment and income generating opportunities. In view of the dwindling oil revenue and endemic uncertainty in the global oil market, it has become imperative for Nigeria to find other more sustainable sources of income. Developing Gurara water-walls as a tourist destination in Niger State will boost the economy of the State. To carry out development at the fall, it is of an utmost importance to carry out an assessment of the tourism potentials within the falls and its environ. This study therefore assessed the tourism potentials of Gurara Waterfalls so as to propose measures for its development.

Tourism Potentials

The potency of tourism as a strong resource in turning the fortunes of any nation especially the developing nations are no longer in doubt. Its potentials in this direction have been widely acclaimed and highly appreciated. Hence more than ever before, tourism development and exploration are assuming major policy thrusts of most governments. For instance, Nigeria's "National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS) I & II" strongly recommended a new focus on tourism as a means of employment generation/poverty reduction.

Accruing benefits of tourism to countries are indeed multi-faceted and multi-dimensional which underscore its growing global acceptance, recognition and application. Through in-bound and out-bound tourist movements of people, tourism touches on the economies of so many tourism destinations. In 2005 for instance, the tourism industry registered approximately 800 million international tourist arrivals world-wide so says the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Furthermore, the organization says that 698 million people travelled to a foreign country

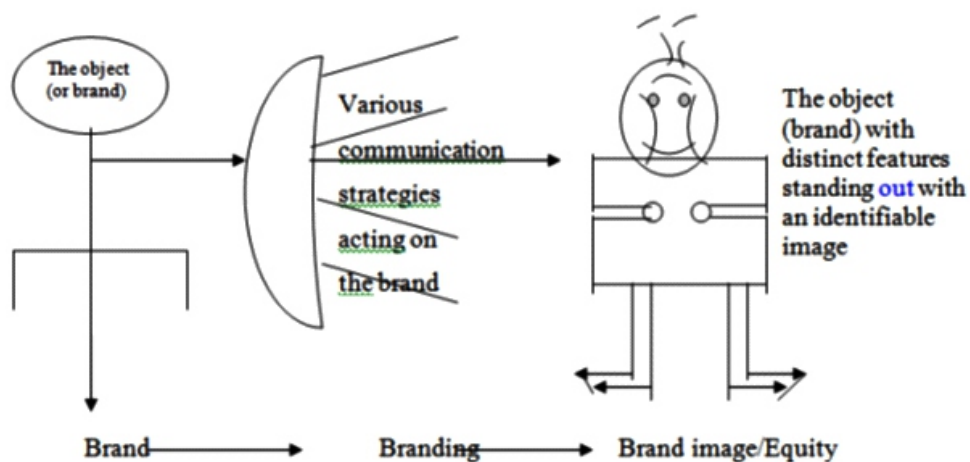
in 2000 spending more than US \$478 billion. It further stated that international tourism receipts combined with passenger transport currently total more than US \$575 billion-making tourism the world's number one export earner, ahead of automotive products, chemicals, petroleum and food (www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism).

Today, tourism stands tall as one of the most emerging top foreign exchange spinner for countries which WTO describes as one of its important indicators pointing out that tourism has become one of the top five export categories for as many as 83% of countries and is a main source of foreign exchange earnings for at least 38% of countries. This clearly means that tourism is one of the top five export resource categories for 83% of world countries and the number one export earner for 38% of countries. This indeed places tourism at vantage position as a foreign exchange spinner for a good number of countries which explains why so many other countries yet to explore its potentials are fastly getting into it. This position is further supported by the 1999 IMF Reports which gave \$504 billion as the global trade receipts from tourism which it says makes it the highest revenue earning sector in the world. Still on this revenue generation impact, tourism is said to generate much for the US government from its National Park services. By the WTO report, \$22 billion is generated annually to the US economy from the services provided by the National Parks which in 1993 alone had a record of 273 million visits. Similarly, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that travel and tourism's direct, indirect and personal tax contribution worldwide was over \$800 billion in 1998. Which it expects to double by 2010 (i.e. next year).

By National Geographic Society Reports, Dubai generates \$200 million annually from tourism and Washington Times in www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism, tourism generated \$650 million in foreign exchange earnings and received 1.2 million tourists in 1999. In Nigeria however, it is recorded that tourism accounts for a little less than 2% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which, regrettably, is not encouraging. Nevertheless, it is highly regarded as the world's biggest economic force today by Okafor (2007:5) because it circulates more money and causes more investment and social contact than any other economic factor. Tourism contributions or impact spans through employment creation, poverty reduction, infrastructure investment and development, among so many others. According to the WTO, tourism supports some 7% of the world workers. It can generate jobs directly through hotels, restaurants, night clubs, taxis and souvenir sales and indirectly through the supply of goods and services needed by tourism-related businesses. For example, hotel accommodation sector alone provided 11.3 million jobs worldwide in 1995. In the Gambia, 30% of the workforce is tourism-dependent; in Maldives, it is 83%, 21% in Seychelles and 34% in Jamaica according to the WTO. The WTO further argues that "as a labour-intensive industry, tourism has the potential to create more jobs per unit of investment than any other industry and that it can be useful source of employment for women and ethnic minority groups. With its enormous economic power and high potential for employment creation, its capacity to spread its socio-economic benefits to all levels of society and to all parts of developing and least developed, tourism can be a leading sector in the fight against poverty. This further

becomes a tool for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty reduction.

Tourism can as well induce and stimulate local governments to provide infrastructures like better water and sewage systems, roads, electricity, telephone and public transport networks, all of which can improve the quality of life for both tourists and residents. And environmentally, when properly developed and managed, tourism can serve as a mechanism for protecting natural environments, preserving historical archaeological and religious monuments and, stimulating the practice of local cultures, folklore, traditions, arts and crafts, and cuisine. Indeed, tourism touches on every aspect of the economy.



Tourism as Nigeria's Re-Branding Strategy

There is no doubt that Nigeria is richly endowed with abundant tourism resources most of which had been highlighted in the previous section. These tourism resources are scattered across the country. The appropriate question or concern here therefore is: how does tourism fit into Nigeria's re-branding tool? Can tourism be employed as a tool for re-branding Nigeria? Can it really be a strong selling point for a country whose image is at the highest negative scale? What magic wand has tourism to do this for the country?

In their study on Destination (Nepal) In A Country Image Context, Nadeau, et al (2008), found a correlation between a country or destination image and tourism. They found that Nepal's attractive scenery of its natural attractions of mountains, hills and rivers as well as its built environment that showcases the cultural attractions of various temples and palaces lead to tourists' positive perceptions of the country. Tourists' overall evaluation of Nepal as a tourist destination in various assessment parameters was quite high. That resulted in their willingness to make further visits to the country and also to recommend same to other prospective tourists. If we concur with the research finding of Nadeau, and others, (2008) as stated above, then the question is: could such an image or positive impression/perception transfer be automatic with destinations? Would every tourist

destination enjoy positive perception from its tourists or customers without any serious effort? The answer definitely is No. Tourism is a product with lots of product brands which only requires effective marketing strategies to develop and generate the desired positive perceptions from the tourists. Its effective marketing strategies lie fully on branding the product brands in order to make them stand out distinctively from other destination brands. The branding of Nigeria's tourism brands would invariably be a re-branding mechanism for the country, Nigeria itself.

Agreed that tourism is an image conferral which though is not automatic, marketing the tourism destinations or brands is no less apt. What's the practical dimension of this to Nigeria? It implies effective marketing or branding of Nigeria's tourism destinations. As noted earlier, a well branded brand posts a high brand image or brand equity. Konecnik and Gartner (2007:14) in their study on Customer-Based Brand Equity for A Destination concluded that proper marketing strategies increase tourists' awareness, appeal to their image or quality perceptions or influence their loyalty dimension. They pointed out that it is necessary to employ different marketing strategies for different foreign markets. Effective marketing or branding of tourism sites/locations in Nigeria would obviously lead to their being better known to the tourists which positively affects the perception/image of such sites/locations by these tourists and finally lead to their being patronized by the tourists.

Strategic marketing campaigns should be employed to increase destination awareness, its image and quality perceptions, and consequently also the loyalty dimension. Such marketing campaigns should emphasize identity, characteristics with an aim to have an impact on tourists' destination image and quality perceptions. A tourist's awareness about a destination and positive perceptions about the image and quality dimensions can lead to visiting or to recommendation to friends and relatives. Tourism sites and locations in the country should therefore be branded or marketed at all times. This implies an all-season effective promotion of the various tourism sites/locations by highlighting and flaunting their unique and distinctive features. In brandishing these unique features, the objective should be to arouse necessary emotional ties in the tourists for these tourism sites/locations. That's the high point of the branding strategy. That our tourism industry is not yet maximizing its potentials is not the absence of the necessary endowments and features but the absence of vigorous promotions and branding strategies.

Beside this branding or promotion, the service profile of the various tourism locations ought to be taken to the next level. The quality of services, reception, physical environment, etiquette and even after service or post-visit relations with tourists should be such that regularly reminds them of such a place and thus creates the nostalgia for repeat visits. With these, tourists would have enduring emotional attachment for the sites/locations which bring them back to the place more often.

With successful branding of the tourism industry expressed more through the orchestrated promotions that are backed up by standard laws, policies and procedures which guide compliance to the promotions by tourism locations/sites, tourists would

always attract more tourists. As the popular saying goes in tourism, a satisfied tourist brings two new others when next he is coming. Because the positive impressions they receive from their receptions and services are exported home which gradually begin to alter the existing stereotypes and negative opinions of the country and ultimately, the total image of corporate Nigeria changes/improves positively. Nigeria can thus reap a lot from a more organized, planned, sustained and developed tourism industry in the country. It carries with it a lot of positive image rub off for the country.

Research Methodology

Data were collected from Primary and Secondary Sources. The primary Data collected are through direct field survey while the secondary data were collected from published materials relevant to this research. Interview was conducted with the Staff of Niger State Culture and Tourism Board which include the General Manager of the Corporation, two clerical officers, the Site Manager of Gurara Waterfalls and the gate keeper of Gurara Waterfalls. Site analysis checklist was used to derive the site analysis report which include; Site analysis and inventory of facilities and attractions, on-site and off-site infrastructures within and around the study area. Direct field observation was also conducted to obtain data on the physical characteristics of the fall and facilities existing and the potentials the Fall holds. A total of 200 Questionnaires were administered to the visitors the fall in March 2018 to ascertain the tourism characteristics of visitors and complementary facilities that can give maximum satisfaction and attract more tourists both locally and internationally. The Questionnaires were administered on daily basis to the visiting Tourists who were willing to respond. Data were presented and analysed using descriptive statistical method through the use of tables, graphs and simple charts e.g. bar charts and pie charts, picture plate presentations and map presentation.

Results and Discussion

It was observed that Gurara waterfalls is an example of Block/Sheet Ledge Waterfall as Water descends from a relatively wide river at a height maintaining partial contact with the bedrock. Result indicated that the Waterfalls is at its peak during the months of June to October in the rainy season. At this period, the water covers the whole cliff and tumbles down the rock to the bed bellow forming a massive water flow (Plate I). The off-peak period of the Falls is between the month of October and May in the dry season when the water flow reduces and the falls are at points from the cliff which flows gently downstream (Plate II).



Plate 1: Gurara Waterfalls during peak period in August
Source: Field Survey (2018).



Plate 2: Gurara Waterfalls during off-peak period in April
Source: Field Survey (2018).

Results shows that the vegetation of study area is characterized by thick forest including broad trees, shrubs, and grasses of several species which serves as good green space that supports biodiversity and ensures neutrality of the environment without distortion. The management also reported that there are animals existing within the study such as monkeys, pythons, birds, antelopes, and other wild animals. The River itself is rich with different species of Fishes.

Infrastructural facilities present at the study area includes; Paved Road of 14 metres width that creates accessibility to the Falls, a shed for food and soft drinks services and a nonfunctional 33KVA Transformer for providing electricity to the Falls. There is no organized water supply infrastructural facility within the Falls as observed and from the interviews. People tend to create the kind of activity that best satisfy them such as swimming and picnicking. However, there is an animal cage intended to be used for a mini zoo which is empty at present, 2 concrete sit outs for relaxation and 2 seesaw swings bar without the swings as observed.

Table 1: Statistics of Tourists Traffic for the Months of March and April in Gurara Falls

MONTH	Frequency	Percentage (%)
March	537	56.7
April	410	43.3
Total	947	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018).

Statistics from the Niger State Culture and Tourism Board shows that the tourists who visited Gurara Waterfalls in March 2018 is 537 Tourists and in April 2018 is 410 Tourists.

Table 2: Age distribution of Tourists

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
less than 18	35	17.5
18-30	97	48.5
30-45	58	29.0
45-60	5	2.5
above 60	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018).

Field survey shows that the majority of Tourists (48.5%) that visited Gurara Waterfalls within this period of research are within the ages of 18 and 30 while the elderly has the lowest percentage (2.5%).

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents according to Employment Status

Employment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Civil servants	16	8.0
Private	20	10.0
Self employed	12	6.0
Unemployed	40	20.0
Student	112	56.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018).

Students are having the highest percentage of Gurara falls patronage as shown in table 3. They usually visit in groups from secondary schools and universities as part of school excursion or group parties and picnics. The self-employed (6.0%) and Civil servants (8.0%) have the lowest percentage, and one of the respondents explained that is as a result of busy work schedule and the only opportunity in the public service is annual leave. He further explained that the existence of the Falls alone cannot attract people of busy schedules and therefore suggest provision of attractions such as recreational facilities and amusement parks for children.

Table 4: Factor that determine Tourism visit to Gurara Waterfalls

Determinant	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased income level	20	10.0
Tourism destination availability	155	77.5
Easy Access to the Fall	25	12.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018).

Result shows that of the tourists (77.5%) visits Gurara Waterfalls because of its mere existence, but stated that they will visit more often if it is fully equipped with facilities and services that gives them maximum satisfaction of tourism experience. This portrays that the tourism potential alone cannot attract tourists compared to when its accessibility, facilities, attractions and services are fully developed to accommodate tourists' behavior.

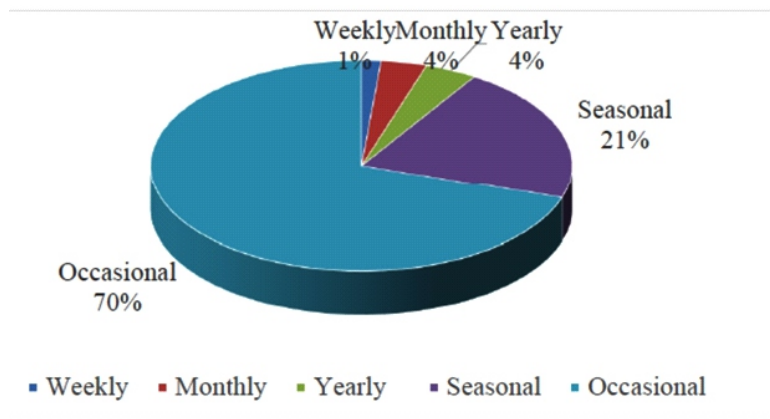


Figure 3: Respondents Frequency of visit

Source: Field Survey (2018)

About 70% of tourists visits Gurara Waterfalls sporadically which is however as a result of its underdevelopment without any motivation and attractions that has pool effect apart from a special event or occasion that requires their presence. However, about 21% of tourists visit the Falls seasonally especially during the festive seasons and some people visit at least once in a year to notice developmental changes and for recreation.

Table 5 shows that 91% which is majority of respondents stays at the fall less than a day this is because there are no much recreational activities to carry out apart from passive sightseeing and swimming or those who are able to do so. About 0.5% stays for more than a day but less than a week, those are the respondents that came for other activities apart from visiting Gurara Waterfalls.

Table 5: Tourists Duration of Stay

Duration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
less than a day	182	91.0
a day	7	3.5
more than a day but less than a week	1	0.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey (2018).

Management of Gurara Waterfalls

Gurara Waterfalls is under the management of Niger State Culture and Tourism Corporation However the inhabitants of Bonu Village are the Custodians of the fall and also serves as security to the falls. Means of revenue generation from the falls is the entrance fee of ₦500 (US\$2.5) paid by visitors before they are allowed to go in. From the tourists' statistics of March and April which is 537 and 410 respectively, the average income Gurara Waterfalls generates at present per head in a month is ₦240,000.00 (US\$1,212).

Management Challenges in Gurara Waterfalls includes the following:

i. Lack of Required Manpower

There is shortage of qualified and relevant staff strength that are directly concerned to the Falls. What the Niger State Culture and Tourism Corporation have is mostly hospitality personnel in terms of hotel management organization and cultural activities within the state. They believe what they have and manages at present are just tourism potentials as such needed more of promotion to attract investment. Employment of high skilled manpower is therefore of lesser priority since revenue generated might not self-sustain the falls management.

ii. Inefficiency in Management

The Niger State Ministry of Culture and Tourism who is in charge of management of Gurara waterfalls could not provide a precise statistics of tourism visits and incidence of death cases over the years and attributed the inability to lack of requisite personnel present at the Location.

iii. Death cases

At the entrance within the Fall there is a sign post that prohibits swimming within the Falls and disclaimer for the security of people who swim. From the interview results, some tourists have drowned as a result of negligence of tourists with 2 records of such cases in 2014.

Table 6: SWOT Analysis of Gurara Waterfalls

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Attractive Features of the Fall ii. Conducive vegetation around the Fall iii. Proximity of the Fall to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) iv. Potential of becoming the “Cash Cow” of Niger State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Inefficient management ii. Inadequate solid waste management iii. Absence of recreational facilities and attractions iv. Underdeveloped Infrastructure
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Revitalization of Local culture and cultural activities ii. New Research into Travel Trends That Favor Destinations in Niger State iii. New Markets Emerging Around The Falls iv. Increase Destination Marketing v. Growth of Ecotourism Market vi. Attraction of investments vii. Increase in Niger State’s Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Political Instability ii. Security issues as a result of Insurgency within the country iii. Ongoing Environmental Degradation iv. Weak Naira Exchange rate

Source: Field Survey (2018).

The SWOT analysis as shown in Table 6, portray the internal influences of Gurara waterfalls as a tourist destination which includes; its strength and its weaknesses that either supports its development or militates against its development these however are within the confides of internal control measures. It also includes; opportunities which are positive impacts of the falls development and Threats which could.

Militate against the growth of such positive impacts that may be derived. These are however external influences outside the confides of Destination control measures. From the SWOT analysis, the Strength and Opportunities far outweigh the Weakness and Threat. This makes the project of developing Gurara Waterfalls a viable one.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research conducted, Niger State can become a hub of international tourism with its abundant natural land features, historical monuments, historical relics and Cultural attractions. However, mere potentials cannot turn the State's economic position around. Gurara Waterfalls can be called Niger State's potential tourism economy which has been left untapped over the years adjudicating from the Fall's lack of infrastructures such as circulation, water and functioning power supply, absence of other facilities and services for more Tourists' attraction and Tourism activities, absence of accommodation facilities and inefficient management.

The following are therefore planning recommendations which would be most appropriate towards achieving the development Gurara Waterfalls.

- i. The need for adequate infrastructural facilities and utilities such as transportation and communication facilities like telephone services, internet services, electricity and water supply is vital and an important ingredient in any tourism market. Therefore, the provision of such infrastructures is very vital in this plan.
- ii. Any tourist destination that is not properly linked with the outside world would have less than expected patronage. It is therefore important to improve upon the Minna-Suleja Road that links Gurara waterfalls to other parts of Nigeria to ensure easy access and encourage visit.
- iii. In development, Resort facilities should be sited in such a way that there will be integration between natural and manmade facilities within the site creating a balance and continuity which are the major criteria for a sustainable tourism.
- iv. There is need to motivate the field staff and encourage them to understand the need to explore innovative ways of generating revenue, discouraging corrupt practices such as embezzlement which is supported by current economic trend.
- v. Actions such as uncontrolled fishing, bush burning, hunting of animals and refuse dumping in the river should be highly prohibited and enforced.
- vi. The ongoing campaign about urban governance is a right direction to follow in emphasizing the importance of private sector participation in tourism services delivery to the interest group of the society. The habitat agenda adopted by the world's Governance in Istanbul (1996) affirmed that policies and programmes for the development of human settlements require strong, open and accountable local Government institution working in partnership with all interested private sectors.

Tourism policy is very vital in development of tourism activities in Nigeria. It happens that few States in Nigeria has a genuine tourism policy such as Nassarawa State. It is important to establish a policy which provides guideline in tourism Development in the state which must be reviewed and strengthened from time to time. This policy should incorporate all recommendations made in this project

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