

Resort Attractions and Tourists Patronage of Selected Tourism Sites in Rivers State

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Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijarismf.v11.i1.12

Keywords:

Resort attractions,
Tourist patronage,
Man-made
attractions, Natural
attractions

Abstract

Attractions development plays a pivotal role in the tourism industry, as it involves the creation, enhancement, and management of destinations and sites that draw visitors. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between resort attractions and tourists' patronage of tourism sites in Rivers State. The study adopted the cross-sectional research design to explore the relationship between resort attractions and patronage of tourism sites in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. A sample of 103 participants was selected using the Taro Yamen sampling technique. Analysis was done with descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment coefficient to determine relationships among variables. The study found significant evidence to support the hypothesis that both natural and man-made attractions have a substantial relationship with tourist patronage. The study recommended that in order to improve patronage of resorts, developers should pay attention to the attractions incapable of pulling and pushing tourists to the site.

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Background to the Study

In emerging tourism industry, increased competition for tourists has spurred many tourist destinations to specialize in developments that will give them an edge over several competitors. One way of achieving this is to develop strategies to market or promote the destination as being a unique and distinctive place. Measuring patronage is important for the survival, development, and success of the tourism business (Sirakay, 2003). When measuring tourist patronage, the basic premise is that tourists reflect on their experiences. Tourist patronage is one of the most frequently examined topics in the hospitality and tourism industry because it plays an important role in the continued and sustained operation of any tourism business (Gursoy, McCleary, Lepisto, 2003, 2007). A high level of tourist satisfaction is likely to generate positive feedback from the tourist including patronage of the tourist area, increased purchase of products, and recommending these to others (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Gursoy et al. 2003; Andaleeb and Conway, 2006). The input of the tourists towards the development and enhancement of a tourist destination is therefore essential in maintaining its competitive advantage.

Attractions development plays a pivotal role in the tourism industry, as it involves the creation, enhancement, and management of destinations and sites that draw visitors. These attractions can encompass a wide range of offerings, from natural wonders and cultural heritage sites to theme parks, museums, and entertainment complexes. This introduction explores the significance of attraction development, its impact on tourism, and the evolving trends in this field. Attraction development is a dynamic process influenced by numerous factors, including changing traveler preferences, technological advancements, and environmental considerations (Butler, 2006). In recent years, there has been a shift towards sustainable and experiential attractions that not only captivate tourists but also contribute to the long-term well-being of host communities (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). Attractions serve as magnets for tourists, driving economic growth, employment opportunities, and community development (Smith, 2003). They are not only crucial for attracting visitors but also for extending their length of stay and encouraging repeat visits (Leiper, 2004). Therefore, the strategic development and effective management of attractions are vital for the success of tourism destinations (Inskip, 1991). The patronage of resorts is a critical aspect of the tourism industry, and sustaining visitor numbers remains a challenge. While many resorts offer appealing amenities and services, attracting and retaining guests over the long term remains a formidable task. One significant problem lies in the need for continuous innovation to maintain and increase patronage levels.

Despite the importance of attraction development in resort patronage, there exists a theoretical gap in the understanding of the specific mechanisms and factors that drive the success of these initiatives. While it is widely acknowledged that attractions can enhance patronage, there is limited research that delves deeply into the nuanced dynamics of how attractions influence visitor behavior, satisfaction, and loyalty. Addressing this gap is crucial for devising effective strategies that leverage attractions to optimize resort patronage and overall success.

Conceptual literature

Resort Attraction Development

The key characteristic of tourism is the fact that tourists travel away from the place they usually live in, to attractions. The concept of tourism attraction is relatively clear: it is the place to which people travel, the end of the journey, Keyser (2009). Tourism attraction has been defined differently in different tourism literature some of these definitions are examined in the study. According to Keyser (2009), a tourism attraction is a defined spatial area made up of a mix of tourism resources, created facilities support services, and infrastructure, which are managed, marketed, and consumed under a single brand identity. Attractions are places towards which people and where they choose to stay for a while to experience certain features and characteristics, a perceived attraction of some sort (Leiper, 1995).

The European Union defines a tourism attraction as an area that is separately identified and promoted to tourists as a place to visit, and within which the tourist product is coordinated by one or more identifiable authorities or organizations. The World Tourism Organization also defines tourism attraction as a physical space in which the visitors spend at least one night and is made up of tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources with physical and administrative boundaries that define its management, images/perceptions of market competitiveness (World Tourism Organization, 2003). Attractions and destinations are outlets for tourists who desire to travel to experience places, people, and environments away from where they live. People's views about the tourism experience and resources available at the tourist attractions draw tourists from originating areas or markets along routes to the destination or tourist receiving area.

Natural Attractions

Natural attractions play a pivotal role in the tourism industry, drawing visitors to destinations worldwide. In Nigeria, a country blessed with diverse landscapes and ecosystems, natural attractions hold enormous potential for tourism development (Inskeep, 1991). The natural attraction has some significance, one of which is defined within the cultural and environmental heritage. Nigeria's natural attractions, such as the Cross River National Park and Yankari Game Reserve, showcase the country's rich cultural and environmental heritage (Nwankwo, 2017). They serve as windows into the nation's history and biodiversity. Natural attractions stimulate economic growth by attracting tourists and generating revenue for local communities (Gboyega & Ogunyemi, 2017). This income supports infrastructure development and job creation. The development of natural attractions often involves conservation efforts to protect ecosystems and endangered species (Olomolaiye et al., 2018). Sustainable tourism practices promotes environmental preservation. There are several examples of resort attractions in Nigeria. some of them are,

1. Obudu Mountain Resort: Located in Cross River State, this resort offers breathtaking views, temperate climates, and adventure activities, attracting both domestic and international tourists (Ibe, 2019).

2. Ikogosi Warm Springs: Situated in Ekiti State, this natural wonder features warm and cold springs merging in a picturesque landscape, drawing visitors seeking relaxation and therapeutic benefits (Bolaji et al., 2020).
3. Awhum Waterfall: Found in Enugu State, this pristine waterfall surrounded by lush forests offers a tranquil escape for nature enthusiasts and pilgrims (Anozie et al., 2019).

Pearce (2017) stated that man-made attractions are artificial features or sites created to attract tourists and enhance the tourism industry. They play a vital role in diversifying a destination's tourism offerings and can significantly contribute to economic growth. Some of them are listed to include,

1. Man-Made Attractions Development in Nigeria: Nigeria, a culturally diverse and ecologically rich country, has recognized the potential of man-made attractions to boost its tourism sector. Several notable examples showcase the development of such attractions:
2. National Arts Theatre, Lagos: The National Arts Theatre in Lagos is a cultural icon and a significant man-made attraction. Designed to resemble a military hat, it hosts various artistic performances, conferences, and exhibitions, attracting both local and international visitors.
3. Olumo Rock, Abeokuta: Olumo Rock is a transformed natural formation, now enhanced with walkways, elevators, and sculptures. It offers a blend of cultural and adventure tourism, with visitors exploring its caves and experiencing the rich history of the Egba people.
4. Lekki Conservation Centre, Lagos: This conservation center combines natural beauty with man-made elements like the canopy walkway, making it an eco-tourism attraction. It educates visitors on biodiversity conservation and offers a serene escape from urban life.

Sustainable Development Strategies

Man-made attractions in Nigeria contribute to tourism development by offering unique experiences and diversifying the tourism product. However, successful development requires adherence to sustainable practices, effective marketing, and continuous innovation. These attractions showcase Nigeria's cultural and historical richness while boosting its economy and creating opportunities for both tourists and local communities. To promote tourism development in Nigeria, it is important to examine some sustainable development strategies. Some of them include,

1. Community Involvement: Engaging local communities in the planning and management of natural attractions ensures their long-term sustainability (Eagles & McCool, 2002). Sustainable development principles are crucial in creating man-made attractions. They should minimize environmental impact, conserve local culture, and provide socio-economic benefits (UNWTO, 2015).
2. Infrastructure Improvement: Investment in infrastructure such as road networks, accommodations, and visitor centers enhance accessibility and visitor experiences (Olomolaiye et al., 2018).

3. Regulation and Conservation: Effective regulation and conservation measures safeguard natural attractions from overexploitation and environmental degradation (Nwankwo, 2017).
4. Natural attractions in Nigeria possess immense potential for tourism development, offering economic benefits and preserving cultural and environmental heritage. Sustainable development practices, community involvement, and conservation efforts are essential for harnessing the full potential of these attractions, ensuring they continue to enrich Nigeria's tourism landscape.
5. Tourism Promotion: Effective marketing and promotion of man-made attractions are essential to attract tourists. Nigeria can leverage digital platforms, partnerships, and international campaigns (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

Tourists Patronage

Patronage is the business that comes into an establishment generating revenue. Patronage can come in the form of customers, other businesses, or companies; it can also be seen as a business or activity provided by a patron. The patron in the tourism context refers to the tourist who patronizes a destination or attraction. The facilities, attractions, and publicity of a destination affect its patronage. Low patronage of a destination affects the usage of attraction facilities and the morale of workers who depend on the tourism industry for their employment and sustenance. Patronage of tourism destinations has been very low in developing countries, Keyser (2009). This lukewarm attitude to tourism is to some extent a reflection of low patronage by proprietors of tourist attractions. Tourists in some cases are largely not aware of the diversity in terms of such destinations, as publicity through print and visual media is not sufficient.

Bolaji (2017) perceived factors affecting the patronage of domestic tourism in Osun State. The study is an assessment of perceived factors affecting the patronage of domestic natural tourism in Osun State. The research adopted a quantitative method and utilized primary data by administering a questionnaire to the respondents. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered and the respondents were stratified into eight strata. Twenty-seven tourist destinations were reviewed in the study. By the objectives, the study showed that the level of awareness of natural tourism attractions and activities is high, and that nature tourism participation is influenced by the socio-economic characteristics of respondents.

Amalu et al (2017) conducted a study on the assessment of tourists' patronage of Obudu mountain resort, Cross River State, Nigeria. The data for the study were collected through questionnaire surveys, interviews, field inventory, and participatory rural appraisal methods. The data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, averages, graphs, charts, frequencies, and maps. Analysis of variance was employed to test the hypothesis of the study. The result of the analysis revealed that there is a significant variation in tourist arrivals due to natural attraction in the resort and patronage of the Mountain Resort ($P < 0.05$, $df = 11, 216$, $F = 3.27$). It was also observed that

the local people were highly interested and involved in tourism-related activities within the study area and the tourism industry had constantly improved their annual income.

Umukoro et al (n.d) investigated tourism site infrastructure, visitor patronage, and Calabar Metropolis. The study is supported by Qualitative and inferential research design methods to ascertain the predictability of tourist patronage. A sample of one hundred and twenty-five (125) respondents were systematically selected for the study and questionnaires were administered. The multiple nonlinear regression test statistic was deployed to validate the hypotheses developed for the study. Results show that historical artifacts and requisite accommodation were statistically significant in having a positive/direct influence on visitor patronage.

Folorunso et al (2020) investigated the impact of tourism-oriented architectural features on sales in shopping malls of Metropolitan Lagos, Nigeria. The study adopted a multi-level quantitative method of data gathering to obtain the necessary information for the study. Two categories of respondents that are classified as categories A and B were contacted. Category A consists of 208 universal shoppers that were selected at random around the shopping centers while Category B consists of 100 store owners, managers, attendants, and other workers in the malls. Descriptive statistics was used to process the results. Findings show that the inclusion of tourism-oriented architectural features will promote patronage and enhance sales. It also indicated that other facilities such as eateries, cinemas, and sporting facilities promote social interaction, elongate the length of time spent in the mall, and consequently affect sales.

Adigun et al (2016) evaluated the patronage pattern of Idanre Hills as an eco-tourism center in Ondo State. Forty-six questionnaires were administered to the tourists who were randomly selected in the tourist center. To examine the impact of the center on the host community, a systematic sampling technique was used to select one hundred and thirty (130) residents. Three indices were developed to measure the perception of respondents on various aspects of the investigation. These include 'Infrastructural Facilities Index' (IFI), 'Potential Level Index' (PLI), and 'Tourism Effect Index' (TEI). Regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between year and number of patrons. The level of 'security' was perceived to be satisfactory in the area (IFI=4.22). The 'hills' have a major potential in the area (PLI=4.85). The center has a significant effect on 'employment' in the area (TEI=4.26). The study identifies a significant, positive linear relationship between the facility and the number of patrons in Idanre Hill Tourist Center ($r = .864$, $P \text{ value} = 0.001$), which indicates an increase in the level of patronage over the period used (2014-2050). The study revealed that the center has a socio-economic impact on the area in terms of income generation, job creation, and infrastructural development.

Ibimilua (2009) conducted a study on tourism participation: attractions, influences, and key trends in Ekiti state, Nigeria. the research methods include in-depth fieldwork, observation, participation, focus group discussions, and interviews. The research instrument is a questionnaire administration with the aid of a stratified random sampling

technique. Findings from the study revealed that the natural and man-made potentials for recreation and tourism in Ekiti State are multi-various and can attract tourist patronage.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the push-pull factor theory. Pull factors are defined as a destination's characteristics, while push factors are defined as someone's desire to travel, and these factors emerge as components of travel motivation (Crompton, 1977; Dann, 1977). Tourist motivations have been perceived as a dichotomy of push and pull factors (Crompton, 1979; Awaritefe, 2004) and seeking and escaping (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Hudson 1999). Basically, "push factors are considered important in initiating travel desire, while pull factors are considered more decisive in explaining destination choice" (Crompton, 1979, Bello and Etzel, 1985). The push factors are "the intrinsic motivation that compels one to travel while the pull factors are the destination attributes that serve as an attraction for the tourist and thus destination selection" (Crompton, 1979; Awaritefe, 2004). Correia et al (2006) found that push motives were antecedents of the pull factors implying that push factors are the foundations of travel decisions as well as destination choice. It is therefore important to develop tourist destinations so that tourists can be attracted to travel and have the associated unique experiences.

Methodology

The research design employed for this study is a cross-sectional survey. This approach allows for the collection of data from respondents at a specific point in time, providing insights into the relationship between variables within the defined population. The population under study comprises various attraction sites located in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. These sites serve as the backdrop for tourist activities and experiences. The primary respondents for this research are the tourists visiting the attraction sites in Port Harcourt. These individuals represent the target audience who engage with the attractions. To select a representative sample from the population of tourists, the Freund and William sampling technique is applied. This method ensures a systematic and random sampling process, reducing biases and enhancing the sample's representativeness.

A total of 103 tourists are included in the sample. This sample size is determined based on statistical considerations to achieve an acceptable level of confidence in the research findings. This study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected directly from tourists through a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. Secondary data is obtained from existing literature and records related to the attraction sites. The primary data collection method involves administering a structured questionnaire to tourists. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions, including those with a five-point Likert scale to ensure respondents' perceptions and opinions.

Descriptive Statistics was used to summarize and present the collected data, offering insights into the characteristics and patterns of tourist responses. Inferential statistics are utilized to draw conclusions and make predictions based on the sample data, extending findings to the broader population while Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient was applied to assess the strength and direction of relationships between variables, specifically for hypotheses analysis, unveiling any correlations between variables of interest.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Test of Relationship between Natural Attractions and Tourists Patronage

Correlations			
		Natural Attractions	Tourists Patronage
Natural Attractions	Pearson Correlation	1	.891**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Tourists Patronage	Pearson Correlation	.891**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2023.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was found to be 0.891, indicating a strong positive correlation. The p-value (two-tailed) was determined to be 0.000, suggesting that the observed correlation is statistically significant. Given that the obtained p-value of 0.000 is less than the predetermined significance level of 0.05, it is therefore appropriate to reject the null hypothesis and instead adopt the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the results presented in table 1 above, a substantial positive correlation coefficient ($r^2 = 0.891$) has been observed between Natural Attractions and Tourists Patronage. The coefficient of determination, shown as $r^2 = .891$, indicates that about 79% of the variability in tourist patronage can be explained by Natural Attractions, leaving the remaining 21% to be influenced by other variables. The statistical significance of the p-value being less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) suggests the existence of a significant association. The study yielded statistically significant results, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This observation implies that there is a significant association between the degree of Natural Attractions and the level of tourist Patronage. This is consistent with the research conducted by Amuele et Al (2017) which of and that natural attractions significantly motivated tourist patronage. Again, this study upheld the findings of Bolaji (2017) which contends that the awareness of natural attractions stimulates patronage

Table 2: Test of impact of Man-Made Attractions on Tourists Patronage

Correlations		Man-Made Attractions	Tourists Patronage
Man-Made Attractions	Pearson Correlation	1	.879**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Tourists Patronage	Pearson Correlation	.879**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2023.

Based on the obtained findings, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is determined to be 0.879, indicating a strong positive correlation between man-made attractions and tourist patronage. The coefficient determination of r^2 879 indicates that 77% of tourist patronage can be predicated on man-made attractions. This finding supports the findings of Folorunsho et al (2020) who posited that tourism-oriented architectural features will promote tourism patronage. Also, the study is in line with the study of Ibimilua (2009) who asserted that both natural and man-made attractions can spur patronage.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study aimed to evaluate the relationship between resort attractions and tourists' patronage of tourist sites in Rivers State. Two research hypotheses were stated to guide the study. The result of data analysis reveals that there is a significant correlation between natural and man-made resort attractions and tourist patronage underscores the importance of recognizing the impact of developing a resort center. The findings provide valuable insights into how resort developers make viable resort development plans and necessary attractions to attract patronage. The positive association between natural attractions and tourist patronage suggests that tourists make decisions about where to visit based on the kind of attractions. Most nature travelers decide tourism cites based on the natural attractions resident in that cite. Similarly, the link between man-made attractions and tourist patronage suggests that investment in building magnificent architectural facilities will spur tourists to visit. Based on the conclusions from the study, it recommends the need to improve patronage of resort centers in Nigeria. Equally, developers of tourism destinations should pay attention to the attractions that can pull and push tourists to the site.

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