DESTINATION EXPERIENCE AND TOURISTS' BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the direct effect of destination experience on tourists' behavioural intentions in the tourism industry in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The descriptive research generated primary data from 150 domestic tourists who patronised Port Harcourt as a tourism destination. A well-structured questionnaire containing 12 items, with four demographic items was used for the primary data collection. The result of the inferential statistical analysis with the help of SPSS showed that revisit intention and loyalty towards Port Harcourt as a destination is driven by destinations experience. The empirical study extends the understanding of the destination experience construct by studying its influence on tourists' behavioural intentions in the context of a developing country Nigeria. Destination Management/Marketing Organisations (DMOs) and tourism service providers at destinations are expected to build capabilities in the area of experiential value conceptualisation and delivery based on the needs and expectations of their visitors/tourists. This is because the delivery of memorable touristic experience will engender tourist satisfaction which is capable of promoting positive tourists' behavioural outcomes such as revisit intentions and destination loyalty. To achieve success in this regard, managers of visitor attractions and other tourism service providers in destinations such as hotels, Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) are expected to develop capabilities in touristic experience management.

KEYWORDS

Destination experience. Tourist Satisfaction. Revisit Intention. Experiential value. Destination Experience Management

Introduction

The tourism industry is a global trade that is characterized by intensive competition (Perdue, 2002; Ekeke&Olori, 2020). Additional characteristics of tourism are that it is multidisciplinary, multidimensional and very complex activity which involves various sectors in the business environment, the government and other strategic stakeholders such as community and tourists (Purnama, &Wardi, 2019). These essential features of tourism make a demand on the destination managers and tourism service providers to first carry out consumer research to understand the needs and expectations of their target market. The marketing goal in this regard is to leverage on the revealed knowledge to develop tourism marketing/destination strategies capable of delivering tourist (customer) value and being able to capture value in return (Kotler & Armstrong 2010).

The tourist value to be delivered at destinations is a contribution of all the tourism service providers who offer services that enhances the Memorable Touristic Experiences (MTEs). A tourist leaves the destination with memorable touristic experiences if the quality of services rendered were top notch by the different service providers. The service providers include transporters(airlines, taxis, etc), hospitality organisations, (food & beverage, hotels, entertainment), visitor attractions (Parks, zoos, shopping centers, amusement parks, beaches, festivals, etc), institutional organisations (Embassies, Immigration Services, Ministry of Health, etc), travel intermediaries(travel agencies and tour operators), and other subsidiary services.

The foregoing is in agreement with the assertion of Rather, (2018) who argued that the ability to create excellent customer experience in the modern hospitality industry remains the key source of differentiation strategy which enables the organisations to achieve competitive advantage which promotes valuable customer relationships. This is applicable to other tourism service providers at destinations since the tourism product is composite in nature. Mahdzar, Shuib, Ramachandran, and Afandi, (2015) and Kim, Hallab, and Kim (2012) have demonstrated that the experiences of tourists at destinations are effective antecedents to the future behavioural intentions towards the destinations.

The foregoing is in consonance with the fact that memorable touristic experience has become the product in the competitive tourism industry, thus confirming the paradigm shift from traditional marketing to experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999; Brakus, Schmitt, &Zarantonello 2009). The implication being that destination managers must ensure that tourists leave with memorable touristic experiences.

In extant literature, there are empirical studies in various tourism market contexts at the exclusion of Nigeria to prove that destination experience commonly calledcustomer experience affects tourists' behavioural intentions (Luo, Lam, & Wang, 2021; Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen,2016; Zhang, Wu, &Buhalis, 2018; Chen, N., & Funk, 2010; Atmari, & Putri, 2021; Huang, & Hsu, 2009; Pai, Kang, Liu, & Zheng, 2021; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, &Leistritz, 2013. Mahdzar, et al., 2015;Kim, et al., 2012;). This current study attempts to fill the gap in literature by investigating the effect of destination experience on tourists' 'behavioural intentions, in Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Destination experience

A destination is a place where all the components of tourism are made available by tourism service providers for the consumption by tourists/visitors. In the view of Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith (2000), as destination connotes as a set of complementary tourism products and services which forms the overall travel experiences of a tourist in the area visited (destination). The resultant touristic experience gained by tourists in a destination is what constitute destination experience. Wang, (2016) describes destination experience satisfaction as the overall evaluation or impression of a tourist as regards the overall experience he/she must have had after visiting a destination for touristic purposes. This conforms to the theory of the composite nature of the tourism product. Every service provider is to ensure that they offer the best of service capable of enhancing the overall memorable touristic experience of the tourists at a particular destination.

Tourists' Behavioural intentions

Hendijani, Sambasivan, Ng, and Boo, (2013) suggested that behavioural intentions could be viewed as the result of consumer's decision which go through the processes of selecting, delivering, and using market offers such as tangible products, services, ideas or experiences, in satisfying needs and desires. Leong, Ab Karim, Awang, and Abu Bakar, (2017) argues that the behavioural intentions of consumers in every market context connotes an evaluative responses towards market offerings (product, services, etc.) or a subject such as situation and that contribute to the creation of a positive or negative feeling. Amoah, Radder, and Van Eyk (2016), posit that overall tourist satisfaction is what engenders behavioural intention in the context of tourism marketing. This explains why the concept of behavioural intentions has been used extensively in the context of tourism marketing to investigate tourist behaviour after they must have experienced tourism products or services in a particular destination (Widjaja, Jokom, Kristanti,   & Wijaya, 2020). Extant literature has demonstrated that tourist behavioural intentions engenders loyalty towards a particular destination or tourism-related activity (Widjaja, et al., 2020), referals or positive word of mouth communications and revisit intentions (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013; Rajaratnam, Nair, Pahlevan, &Munikrishnan, 2015). For this current study, the measures of tourists' behavioural intentions used are revisit intention and destination loyalty.

Revisit Intentions: A review of the definition of return patronage byYoung, Clark, and McIntyre (2007, p.92) into revisit intention in the context of tourism will be "the likelihood that a current tourist of a tourism destination expects to return in the future for a memorable touristic experience". It is crucial for destinations to ensure that tourists s are satisfied at all times because it is only satisfied tourists that may be willing to go back to a particular destination for patronage. It is important that destination managers and other tourism service providers to enhance the level of tourist satisfaction through memorable tourism experience in order to ensure a return visit (Darley, Luethge, &Thatte, 2008).

Destination loyalty: In the tourism market environment, tourist loyalty to a particular destination brand could be viewed as a repeat visit to a holiday destination as a manifestation of tourist loyalty towards the brand (e.g., Ehrenberg et al., 2004).

Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Relationship between Destination Experience and Tourists' Behavioural Intentions

In Isreal, Stylidis, Belhassen, and Shani, (2017) investigated the interrelationships between perceived quality, destination image, satisfaction and behavioural intentions using an integrated path model. The unit of analysis were domestic tourists who visited Eilat, Israel. The findings showed positive relationships between image, quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions of domestic tourists. Also, the affective image component exerted greater impact on the overall destination image than the cognitive component.

Widjaja, Jokom, Kristanti, and Wijaya, (2020) investigated the effect of quality, satisfaction of culinary experience, the satisfaction of destination experience, on behavioural intentions in the context of culinary tourism in Indonesia. A total of 395 international tourists who travelled to Indonesian for food tourism were sampled. The statistical results from structural equation modelling revealed the effects of culinary experience quality on culinary experience satisfaction and destination experience satisfaction as being direct. On the other hand, the statistical results proved to be indirect effects between culinary experience quality and behavioural intentions with mediation by culinary experience satisfaction and destination experience satisfaction.

In Montenegro,Bigovic, and Prašnikar, (2015) investigated the relationships between four destination attributes (perceived quality of a destination's offerings, tourist satisfaction, perceived equity, perceived benefits) and tourists' behavioural intentions in six coastal destinations while incorporating simultaneously the emotional and rational self-regulatory mechanisms.. A total of 703 tourists were sampled. The statistical results from structural equation modelling showed that destination attributes influenced perceived quality of a destination's offerings that directly and positively relate with perceived benefits, tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Other empirical results includes: satisfaction was determined by equity perceptions, perceived quality of a destination's offerings related indirectly to tourist behavioural intention (through perceived benefits and tourist satisfaction), satisfaction also mediated the relationship between perceived equity and tourist intended behaviour.

Ramkissoon, and Uysal, (2011) tested a structural model that investigated the effects of motivation, perceived authenticity, information search behaviour and destination imagery on tourists' behavioural intentions in the context of cultural attractions consumption. Primary data were collected at selected visitor attraction sites with cultural and natural heritage in the island of Mauritius. The statistical results from structural equation modelling and hierarchical multiple regression used to test the hypothesised relationships revealed the following; perceived authenticity had positive significant relationship with cultural behavioural intentions of tourists, destination imagery had positive influence on tourists' cultural intentions, information search behaviour exerted a negative influence on tourists' cultural intentions. Also motivation did not have any influence on tourists' cultural intentions. Perceived authenticity exerted a positive moderating effect on all the relationships between information search behaviour, motivation, destination imagery and cultural behavioural intentions of tourists.

Wong, and Lai, (2021) constructed a research model that links gaming Memorable Touristic Experiences (MTEs) and non-gaming Memorable Touristic Experiences (MTEs) with overall satisfaction, the destination image, and behavioural intentions. The essence was to understand how MTEs for both gaming and non-gaming activities work together to influence tourists' behavioural intentions. The statistical results indicated that non-gaming MTEs have a stronger effect than gaming MTEs on the destination image. On the other hand, both MTEs (gaming and non-gaming) influence tourists' revisit intention, but gaming MTEs have no significant influence on overall satisfaction and word-of-mouth.

The fore going empirical results from different contexts have shown that the research results contribute more to a deeper understanding of which behavioural processes together with the strength, that enhances tourist loyalty at the destination level. In the final analyses, the results provide better insights into the predictors of behavioural intentions in a destination marketing context. From the foregoing, we predict as follows;

H1: Destination experience has positive significant effect on tourists'revisit intentions.

H2:Destination experience has positive significant effect on tourists' destination loyalty

Research Methodology

This empirical study adopted descriptive research design. The choice of the survey method is due to the fact that the study required the collection of data that evaluated tourists' attitude, preference, behaviour and perception towards destinations and what they offer. The design also permit researchers to hypothesise several variables in measurable relationships. The target population for study were current tourists found at various tourism centres during the period of questionnaire administration. The sample size was determined using Freund and William's formula for sample size determination from unknown population. The result was a sample size of 150. The sampling method adopted was the purposeful sampling technique. Out of a total of 150 questionnaires distributed, 120 were retrieved and they were all useable and therefore subjected to data analysis.

The questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. Extant literature provided the sources of items used with appropriate readjustments in order to conform with the current study's research purpose and context. The items for destination experience were measured using items adapted from Mahdzar, et al (2015).The items for revisit intention were adapted from Ryu , Lee and Kim, (2012), and Mahdzar, et al (2015), while that of destination loyalty were adapted from Vada, Prentice, and Hsiao,(2019).All the measurement items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by: Strongly Disagree [SD](1). Disagree [D](2), Agree [A](3), Agree fairly strongly(4) and Strongly Agree [SA](5) to express the degree of agreement with the items or otherwise.

Research Results

Testing of Hypotheses with Simple Linear Regression

Hypothesis 1

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.915[a]	.837	.836	.32255

a. Predictors: (Constant), Destination Experience

Table 2 ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	103.253	1	103.253	992.425	.000[b]
	Residual	20.080	193	.104		
	Total	123.333	194			

a. Dependent Variable: Revisit Intention
b. Predictors: (Constant), Destination Experience

Table 3 Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.520	.123		4.220	.000
	Destination Experience	.880	.028	.915	31.503	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Revisit Intention

Simple Regression Analysis

Table 1,2 and 3 shows the simple regression analysis which shows that un-standardized beta (β) of destination is: (β = 0.880), while value of R square = 0.837, F = 992.425 &p=.000< 0.05. This specifies that destination experience explains 83.7 % variation in revisit intention Port Harcourt, as a destination in Nigeria.

The result of the simple regression analysis shows that destination experience influenced revisit intentions of tourists and therefore made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable (see Table 2 and 3) (β = 0.880, p=0.000 < 0.05). This implies destination made significant unique contribution to the equation.

Therefore the model can be written as:

Revisit Intention = 0.880(BE) + 520

The model suggest that by associating destination experience of a destination brand, the empirical model can increase the level of tourists' intention to revisit the destination when other things remain constant. Accordingly therefore, changes in destination experience   can have the biggest influence on level of tourists' intention to revisit the destination for touristic experiences as its beta co-efficient (β = 0.880, p=0.000 < 0.05) is very high.

Hypothesis 2

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.951[a]	.904	.904	.24524

a. Predictors: (Constant), Destination Experience

Table 5 ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	109.808	1	109.808	1825.729	.000[b]
	Residual	11.608	193	.060		
	Total	121.415	194			

a. Dependent Variable: Destination Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Destination Experience

Table 6 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.437	.094		4.661	.000
	Destination Experience	.908	.021	.951	42.729	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Destination Loyalty

Table 4, 5 and 6 shows the simple regression analysis which shows that un-standardized beta (β) of destination is: (β = 0.908), while value of R square = 0.904, F = 1825.728 &p=.000< 0.05. This specifies that destination experience explains 83.7 % variation in destination loyalty revisit in Port Harcourt, as a destination in Nigeria.

The result of the simple regression analysis shows that destination experience influenced tourists'behavioural intentions in terms of destination loyalty of tourists and therefore made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable (see Table 5and 6) (β = 0.908, p=0.000 < 0.05). This implies destination made significant unique contribution to the equation.

Therefore the model can be written as:

Destination Loyalty = 0.908(BE) + .437

The model suggest that by associating destination experience of a destination brand, the empirical model can increase the level of tourists' intention to revisit the destination when other things remain constant. Accordingly therefore, changes in destination experience can have the biggest influence on level of tourists' loyalty to destination for touristic experiences as its beta co-efficient (β = 0.908, p=0.000 < 0.05) is very high.

Testing of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

Decision Rule

If   PV < 0.05   =   Hypothesis is supported

            PV > 0.05   =   Hypothesis is not supported

Hypothesis one: The outcome of analysis show that destination experience had significant effect on tourists' revisit intentions to the destinations (β = 0.880, p=0.000 < 0.05).The hypothesis was therefore supported

Hypothesis two: The outcome of analysis show that destination experience had significant effect on destination loyalty to the destinations (β = 0.908, p=0.000 < 0.05). The hypothesis was therefore supported

Discussion of Results

The results shown in Table 6, provide support for the first hypothesis (H1) conceived for the study. **Hypothesis 1** showed a significant effect of destination experience on tourists' revisit intentions to the destination ($\beta = 0.880$, p=0.000 < 0.05). Therefore, H1 is supported. This finding is consistent with the findings ofStylidis, et al (2017) and Widjaja, et al (2020)

Hypothesis 2 posited a significant effect of destination experience on tourists' behavioural intentions in terms of destination loyalty. With $\beta = 0.908$, p=0.000 < 0.05, the effect is significant. This result is consistent with the prediction of H2 and is therefore supported. Thus, a higher level of destination experience provided at the destinations is associated with a high propensity by tourists to be loyal to the destination. This finding is consistent with the finding of Stylidis, et al (2017) and Widjaja, et al (2020)

Conclusion

The empirical study examined the effect of one of the tourism service quality factors (destination experience) in shaping the tourists' behavioural intentions at Port Harcourt as a destination in South-South, Nigeria. To test the hypotheses, data were collected from current tourists patronizing some tourism service providers in Port Harcourt such as Port Harcourt Pleasure Park and hotels.
The empirical results supported thetwo posited research hypotheses significantly.

An important finding of the study is the fact that destination experience had stronger effect on tourists' destination ($\beta = 0.908$) than tourists' revisit intentions ($\beta = 0.808$). The reason is not far-fetched. This is because for a destination, tourists expect a more memorable touristic experiences that is capable of enhancing their satisfaction with such a destination. In conclusion therefore, the outcome of the research indicates that destination experience constitute important determinant of tourists' behavioural intentions such as revisiting the destination and being loyal to the destination. The findings of this empirical study have purposeful and fruitful implications to both academicians and entrepreneurs(the practitioners).

Study Implications

The effect of one of the principal factors (destination experience) determining tourists' behavioural intentions in the tourism industry is a novel contribution in the context of Nigeria. It is very important for tourism service providers in destinations to seek and implement strategies that will enhance the memorable touristic experience of tourists who visit their destinations. Entrepreneurs operating tourism service organisations should utilise their scarce resources on developing capabilities on service quality. This will enhance customer satisfaction which is capable of promoting memorable touristic experiences in such destinations.

Limitations and Future Research

The fact that the sample unit for this study was limited to Nigerians who sought touristic experiences at Port Harcourt may hinder the quest to generalize the research findings. Further research should involve foreign tourists.

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