



DESTINATION AWARENESS STRATEGIES AND HOLIDAY DESTINATION CHOICE IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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| Article history: | Abstract: |
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| <p>Received: 26th January 2021 Accepted: 11th February 2021 Published: 1st March 2021</p> | <p>This study evaluated the effect of destination awareness strategies on holiday destination choice in South-South region of Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of domestic and foreign tourists at 4 tourist sites during the 2019 Christmas and New year holiday from which a sample of 323 visitors was drawn using Freud and Williams formula for sample size determination from an infinite population. Primary data were collected from a well-structured questionnaire and administered on the visitors/tourists at four beaches in Akwa Ibom State, and secondary data from academic journal papers, textbooks, and internet resources. Statistical tools for data analyses include; descriptive analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and, Regression Analysis. The findings of the descriptive analysis revealed destination promotional deficiencies in the deployment of traditional and new media and low tourist arrivals at the beaches. The study concludes that destination awareness had a significant positive effect on holiday destination choice in South-South, Nigeria. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that adequate mass media campaign be mounted by Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the creation of website for each tourist sites to showcase their attractions and other attributes to potential domestic and international tourists for more arrivals and spending for eco-tourism development.</p> |

Keywords: Destination Awareness Strategies and Holiday Destination Choice

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourist destination choice, repeat visit and referrals are crucial to destination management, performance and sustainability (Hierson, 2018). An understanding of the various influences that exert on tourist decision-making process is key to designing and implementing destination marketing strategies. Consumer behavior literature recognizes internal and external factors that individually and collectively influence brand choice. Place promotion is recognized as one of external factors (marketing tools) for communicating value. In the destination context, this is often used to communicate destination attributes, raising expectations regarding the anticipated benefits to the target market segment and influencing destination choice. Promotion capability of a tourist destination is not just expressed in a positive image creation but also in distinguishing a tourist destination from similar destinations so that tourist can make informed travel choices (Chacko, 1997). It also reflects tourist satisfaction with communication and availability of information provided by tourist board or agencies about the destination (Micallef et al, 2011). Consequently, informed travel decision can lead to travel satisfaction when the tourist experience at the destination matches pre-travel expectations. Fridgen (1991) refers to this as "holiday experiences that delight the senses through activities, memories, opportunity to learn, socialize, challenge one's self or simply to be alone". Deductively, it could be argued that the way the experiential products are promoted is crucial to destination impression, choice and expectations at the destination which can impact on tourist satisfaction in their information search and purchase decision process as well as revisit intention to the destination.

Many countries are characterized by natural and man-made attractions. Their value as tourism products depend not solely on their endowment but also on their drawing power in influencing holiday travel choice, stay and spending at the destination which benefits the host communities, destination operators and the whole economy (Esu, 2015). As competition intensifies among tourist destinations in the domestic and international marketplaces, destination marketers are under intense pressure to design effective marketing strategies to outwit their rivals or suffer the humiliation of being left behind heavily footed with many attendant unpleasant consequences. One of the veritable marketing strategies deployed by destination marketers to attract visitors is promotion (Bhatia, 2012).

Therefore, the ability of a tourist destination to create sufficient awareness for its attractions, unique culture, landscape and heritage for memorable tourism experience has become a veritable source of competitive advantage in the tourism market.

A destination is a place visited by a tourist; a country, region, city or locale with products and services to satisfy the tourists (Chahal & Devi, 2015). Accordingly, destination awareness can influence travel choice, satisfaction and revisit intention. This is because destination awareness is a function of destination marketers' ability to effectively deploy old and new media to market their tourist sites, landmarks and cultural heritages.

Research suggests that France, USA, Spain, China and Italy were among the 10 leading countries of preferred destinations in 2018 (World Travel and Tourism Council Report, 2019) accounting for about 70% of international travelers. This is not surprising because these countries spend huge sum to create destination awareness through promotional strategies. Kambi (2017) argues that destinations characterized by low tourism patronage are not necessarily those of scarce tourist resources but those with inadequate tourist products and poor visibility, thus indicative of promotional incapability. Although Nigeria is blessed with natural tourism assets, unique cultures, festivals, arts and crafts some of which have been packaged for the domestic and international tourism market, patronage, however, remains low, suggesting that something is wrong with the promotion techniques of tourism boards, agencies and tourist travel organizations in some regions and states of Nigeria.

Prior studies have linked brand awareness with positive outcomes such as choice, differentiation, referrals across many industrial, organizational and geographical contexts. However, there is little empirical research on destination awareness through promotion and its effect on tourist destination choice in the context of South-South region of Nigeria, thus creating a gap in the literature. This study fills this void as it evaluates the effect of destination awareness strategies of tourism promotion agencies on destination choice of eco-tourist sites in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. This study is important because it can help to improve tourist destinations performance in Nigeria through increased tourism patronage and tourist spending for the socio-economic development of our nation and in expanding the frontier of knowledge in tourism marketing.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Destination Awareness Strategies

Destination awareness otherwise known as promotional capability of a tourist destination is the awareness-generating competence of an organization or a destination in communicating its positive product/service attributes to the target audience in such a way as to influence favourable responses towards it (Oshnik (2009). In this regard, promotional capability involves the use of marketing communications tools to project a positive image for the brand. As an important tactical element, Morgan (2012) asserts that communicating effectively with customers and prospects is an essential marketing capability associated with customer value delivery. The marketing literature suggests that such communications capabilities are built upon fundamental marketing activities such as advertising, social media participation, sponsorship, public relations, and corporate image management (Assaker, 2008). To possess a strong marketing communications capability, firms must have essential skills such as: communicating the benefits of firm's new products and services to potential customers, reminding current users of the product benefits and availability, as well as reinforcing the purchase decision to reduce cognitive dissonance.

Buhalis (2000) stated that promoting tourist destinations essentially implies the development of capabilities of communicating channels with clientele and other stakeholders to increase awareness and persuade tourist to purchase products. Destination promotion requires a capability to co-ordinate campaign and message for all local principals and suppliers. Bhartia (2010) states that promotional capabilities are very crucial to tourism marketing in creating awareness and stimulating demand for tourism services. Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) show that destination marketing organizations in many countries that value tourism; spend thousands of dollars on advertizing of their tourism assets through national and international electronic and print media to target audience across the globe. Buhalis (2000), however, observes that targeting the right market with the right message at the right time is always tricky, especially for destinations, which attract consumers from several geographical regions as well as cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Marketing literature recognizes five types of promotion strategies which include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and publicity. They are sometimes collectively referred as marketing communications or promotional strategies (Kotler et al.). Page and Connell (2006) note that advertising is one of the most widely used promotional tools of tourism used to communicate the destination image primarily because of the intangibility of tourist products. It is often based on real or perceived image of tourism and destination. Advertising is a non-personal presentation of the goods and services in the mass media by identified sponsor (Okeafor,2005). In the context of a tourist destination, this may involve the consideration of both the traditional and new media to communicate destination information and build a destination brand. Traditional media (old media) include television, radio, newspapers, brochures, magazines, billboard adverts, etc. New media relate to web-related communications such as on-line social media networks, blogs, social media forms (Youtube and virtual world) have been used by destination operators to communicate destination attributes to potential tourists. Friedmam and Friedman cited in Goyal (2021) identified new media characteristics, also known as 5Cs of new media to include communication, collaboration, community, creativity and convergence. Thompson (2018) distinguishes new media from old media by such features as digitalization, interactivity, hypertextuality, networking, virtuality and simulation. In the same vein, sales

promotion through the use of incentives has been deployed to influence travel behavior and travel agents' effectiveness. Similarly, Morgan and Pritchard (2004) opine that destination promotion can be developed in a variety of ways, most obviously in advertising, through direct marketing, personal selling on websites, brochures, social media, and billboard. It is also through public and media relations, as well as through the co-operation of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) with journalists, event organizers and film-makers.

Moreover, promotional strategies can be gleaned from 'the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience (Gold and Ward, 2004), but also encompasses 'flagship' developments and 'spotlight' events in the arts, media, leisure, heritage, retailing or sports industries. (Edemeni, 2011; Siaka & Morrison, 2009) suggests that destination brand awareness and leisure travel choices have been influenced to a large extent by the promotion competence of tourist organizations. In the destination context, this happens when images of exotic beaches, snow-capped mountains, waterfalls, heritage sites, monuments, shopping malls and hotels are advertised to stimulate travel curiosity in consumers.

Another element of destination promotion that creates awareness to tourists is word-of-mouth. Cvent (2013) perceives word-of-mouth as "an official way of communication between people regarding a product or service, and it is among the first three sources of information through experiences of friends and relatives". It is a powerful tool that provides inquirer with an indirect experience about the product or service through friends and relatives; it is tailored to people that have same interests and is not limited by money or any other constraints as social, time, family or physical features. In the tourism destination context, positive word of mouth is a function of high product/service quality provided by destination operators which creates positive experience for actual customers and referrals to potential customers. Kangogo, Musiega and Manyasi (2013) show that positive word of mouth creates favourable customer responses for tourist organizations and destinations in terms of increase in customer base with positive outcomes such as patronage, increase in sales revenue and profit. Conversely, Litrin (2006) asserts that negative word of mouth can have an overwhelming impact upon a tourist organization image, because dissatisfied visitors spread "unflattering comments related to their experience, but positive recommendation boosts sales and hence good performance for the organization". Hospitality marketers are interested in the word-of-mouth communication because it can make or mar the organization. Thus, Natuhwera (2011) in recognizing the service-oriented nature of the tourism operations enjoins managers to address dissatisfied customers' complaints promptly in an event of service failure so that negative word of mouth (WOM) are generated which ultimately will not augur well for the organization.

Holiday Destination Choice

Berieke (2013) views holiday destination choice as a touristic place preferred by the people for their holiday travel. Bayode (2015) defines it as a choice of a particular country, region, state or locale for holiday travels where tourist attraction sites, facilities and amenities are mounted or located. Edemini (2011) opines that destination choice is a tourist's decision on which destination to travel from multiple alternatives. Thus, destination choice in the tourism marketing perspective, may be seen as the sorting out process, which contains steps such as obtaining passive information, initial choice considering situational constraints, evaluation of evoked set, active information searching and the final destination selection. Consumer marketing literature recognizes that consumer's decision making is a sequential process which involves several steps from need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives and final purchase (Kotler et al, 2010; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997). Tourism destination marketers consider destination choice crucial because previous purchase history can predict future purchase behavior. Accordingly, destination choice over a long time period would provide the necessary information for market segmentation and targeting regarding loyalty segments (Oppermann, 1991).

Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Destination Awareness Strategies and Holiday Destination Choice

Several scholars and researchers in both developed and developing economies have reported the role of promotion in supporting positive organizational outcomes through the patronage of the product/service offerings (Kamau, Waweru, Lewa, Misiko 2015; Margraf 2015; Mayala & Prasad 2012; Umoren; 201; & Micallef et al..2011)). Research by Oyebode (2017) on the influence of marketing strategy on tourism patronage in South West Nigeria revealed that promotional capability of a destination was crucial to the success of the tourism industry in term of creating awareness of tourism services availability or in promoting the tourism opportunities to potential investors. One survey conducted by Adejumo (2016) investigated the effect of product awareness on brand choice and loyalty to noodles among housewives in Lagos State, Nigeria. The research found that the promotion of noodles through radio/TV advertisements, incentives and road shows as well as sponsorship correlated positively with high sales revenue.

Research carried out by Chacko (1997) on positioning a tourism destination to gain a competitive edge, indicated a positive relationship between the increase in global tourism and increased advertising in promoting destinations to the specific target market. One of the key findings of the study was that tourist destination promotion generates perceived functional and affective satisfaction to the tourists, which in turn influences leisure travel choice and performance. Hence, promotion capability of a tourist destination is not just expressed in a positive image creation but also in distinguishing a tourist destination from similar destinations so that tourist can make informed travel decision on the attractive destination to choose. Consequently, informed travel decision can lead to travel satisfaction when the tourist experience at the destination matches pre-travel expectations.

Familmaleki, Aghighi and Hamid (2015) studied the relationship between sales promotion and customer purchasing behavior". Primary data was used and employed regression method of analysis. The study established that sales promotion is an important instrument, which significantly affects customer choice as expressed by the purchase behavior of the firm's consumers. The success of this particular tool is that it involves the administration of incentives to enhance consumer and dealer effectiveness through coupons, contests, rebates, etc. Bhatia (2012) asserts that destination awareness is made possible when information and demand are created in the mass media such as radio, TV, printed brochures, newspapers, magazines and billboard advertisements as well as on social media. In this regard, destination awareness can inform travel decisions, purchase behaviour which in turn determines revenue generation that sustains the destination through tourist satisfaction.

An important study that links promotional capability with destination performance was conducted by Sunday and Bayode (2015). The result of the findings revealed that advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and public relations influenced sales turnover through brand choice. They demonstrated that the aggressive promotional campaign positively and significantly correlated with product choice and organizational performance. The positive influence of promotional mix on brand choice and sales turnover may be explained by the fact that consumer awareness influences brand choice; and if satisfaction is the outcome, then purchase behaviour will be reinforced, thereby leading to increase in sales volume and revenue. The finding suggests that promotional activities can be deployed to influence tourist behaviour positively and to generate a favourable image for a destination by making its tourist products and services appealing to the target market segment.

Nbinye (2014) conducted a study to empirically test the proposition that marketing communications can positively and significantly influence corporate performance in the Mobile Telecommunications industry in Port Harcourt. In that study, the researcher looked at the extent to which investments in advertising, sales promotions, personal and public relations determined the contribution of each promotional to sales and corporate image. A key finding was that a good mix of the promotional elements significantly correlated with brand awareness, increase in subscribers' base and revenue. Since service providers often highlight the benefits of the advertised services or bundle, it could be contended that an advertised service that falls short of customers' expectation would create dissatisfaction which by consequence can affect marketing performance adversely.

Another study that extols the relevance of promotion capability on marketing performance was conducted by Owusu-Ansah and Poku (2013) on the relationship between promotional activities and consumer responses. Based on the empirical analysis from a sample of 220 consumers, the study revealed that personalities in promotions, prices in promotions, messages in promotions and promotional tools had a strong and positive influence on brand choice and consumption which improved organizational performance.

The study conducted by Bhatia (2012) and Matty (2012) on the role of marketing communications in tourism revealed that destination brand awareness influenced vacation choice, consumption behaviour and repeat visit. Williams (2009) investigated the relationship between advertising and destination brand choice using a sample of 367 visitors at the airport, tourist sites and hotels; the results revealed that brand awareness influenced travel decision and hotel brand choice. The finding suggests that promotion capability enables tourist promotion organizations to positively position their products/services, countries, state or regions positively in the minds of their market segment for travel decision choice, visitation and revisit intention.

Research by Micallef et al. (2011) evaluated the satisfaction of beach users at 27 beaches in Andalusian Spain, which differed in terms of development. The researchers categorized the sites into remote, rural, village, urban, and resort beaches, and analyzed the differences amongst each. The results of this study indicated that visitors at all beach types were highly satisfied with the communication and availability of information at the resorts. A primary concern amongst beachgoers was a lack of safety-related information (i.e. safe swimming conditions, water quality results, and first aid information). Thus, the level of destination awareness capability correlated with the level of tourist satisfaction at the beach. When promotion capability of the tourist destination enables it to position the functional and affective benefits of its attributes to the market segment to make informed holiday travel choice through destination advertising and sales promotion techniques, then tourist pre-travel expectation could be met and by extension, satisfaction, especially when the destination delivers the promise (benefit) consistently. However, this conjecture needs to be validated in the Nigerian beach tourism context, which previous studies failed to consider. Therefore, our hypotheses are stated thus:

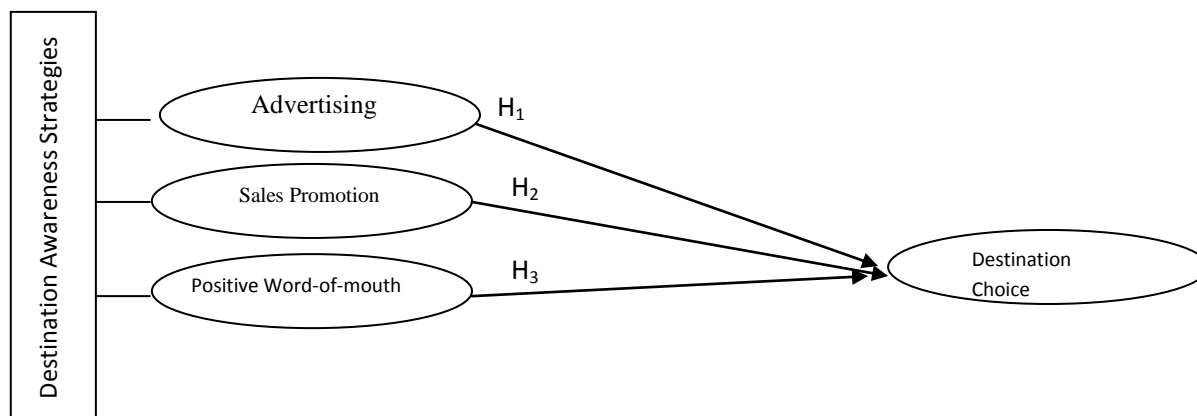
Hypothesis1: Destination awareness through advertising has a positive and significant influence on holiday destination choice in South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis2: Destination awareness through sales promotion has a positive and significant influence on holiday destination choice in South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis3: Destination promotion through positive word-of-mouth has a positive and significant effect on tourist holiday destination choice in South-South, Nigeria.

The implied hypothesized relationships in our propositions are depicted in the research model below:

Fig.1: Operational framework of the study



2.3 Theoretical Foundation

This work draws on the push and pull theory to understand the mechanics of promotion capability and tourist choice in a holiday destination context.

Push and Pull Theory

The theory holds that travelers embarked on a trip because they are pushed by their internal force (intrinsic factors) and the external factors (extrinsic factors) of their origin country (Ravenstein, 1889). The theory also holds that travelers are pulled to migrate to a particular destination as a result of the attractiveness of the destination as being perceived by them. The push and pull theory was propounded by, E.G. Ravenstein, a fellow of the Royal Geographic society in 1855. He used the theory to explain migration patterns of people both within and between nations. Hence, the proposed law of migration. However, its application in tourism motivation studies has been traced to research by Dann (1997). Numerous empirical studies had applied the push and pull theory in tourism motivation studies (Jason et al., 2011; Bashar and Ahmad, 2010; Baloglu and Uysal, 1998 cited in Bello and Bello (2017)).

In the tourism context, the push and pull theory posits that individuals' decision to travel for vacation and holidays is a function of internal factors within the individuals and external factors that draw them to the destination. The 'push' factors are within the individuals whereby people attempt to take care of internal drives such as the need to escape from a certain environment. The 'pull' factors are the products of marketing strategies the destination adopt to stimulate interest in people to visit the place. Visitors are motivated to travel by the 'push' factor, while the visitors select specific tourist destinations by the 'pull' strategies. Klenosky (2002) explains that the 'push' factors are related to the tourists' needs and wants which include the need to escape, rest, relax, go for an adventure, health and fitness, prestige and social interaction. The 'pull' factors are related to the marketing strategies at the tourist destination such as promotion, branding and diplomacy. Put differently, the 'push' factors are determinants of whether to go to a destination or not, while 'pull' factors determine which destination to visit. Adeleke (2015) opines that 'push' and 'pull' factors vary according to the origins of tourists arising from heterogeneity in the economic, socio-cultural and geographic conditions. The kernel of this theory is that it explains why people decide to travel for vacations and holidays.

The push and pull theory is relevant to the present study, especially when viewed from the premise that tourist's decision is a function of some internal drives and perception of a tourist destination. Destination marketing capabilities through marketing communications effectiveness and product development provide information on tourist product availability which enables the tourist to make informed travel decision.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants:

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study because it helped the researcher to find answers to the research questions of the study and to test the hypotheses. The population of this study included domestic and international visitors available at Ibeno beach, Nwaniba beach, Ibaka beach and Utaewa beaches during the Christmas (2019) and New year (January 1st Jan, 2020) holiday season in Akwa-Ibom State. Diesamm (2012) has noted that in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, the population of research involving customers is always large, unpredictable, mobile and transient. It is often not fixed; for example, the likelihood of a researcher meeting the same beach visitor or air passenger again at the same place in the future is slim.

Sampling/Sample Size Determination:

The purposive sampling method was adopted to select the sample based on the researcher's judgment and on-the-spot accessibility, availability and willingness of the beach visitors to participate in the study during the researcher's visits to the beaches. The sample size used in this study was determined by the application of Freund & Williams (1992) formula. Thus, three hundred and twenty-three (323) beach visitors constituted the sample size of the study. Our sample size is consistent with the extant suggestion of Roscoe (1975 cited in Aliman et al., 2016) that a

sample of more than 30 and less than 500 is sufficient for most research in the Social Sciences of which Tourism is a subset. Quota sampling was also adopted in the selection of the sample subjects because of variation in the level of beach development and the destination's drawing power. This sampling method is evident in the number of visitors drawn from each of the four beaches surveyed in the study. As Udall & Eneyo (2011:216) rightly stated, "there is no best sampling method; the nature of the study should dictate the method to be used". The implication is that both probability and non-probability sampling methods are acceptable in tourism/hospitality research.

Research Instrument, Procedure and Measures:

Primary data were obtained from the respondents through the questionnaire, while secondary data were generated from relevant academic journals and textbooks in tourism marketing. The questionnaire was the primary data collection instrument for this study. A questionnaire is a set of specific questions that are constructed and used by the researcher in obtaining information from respondents in a survey research (Makinde 2015). The researcher and ten (10) research assistants administered copies of questionnaires on tourists/visitors visiting the four beaches for fun during the 2019 Christmas and 2020 New year holiday season in Akwa Ibom State. Visitors/tourists were briefed on the purpose of the study and the questionnaires retrieved after completion. The dependent and independent variables were measured on the 5-point Likert Scale, and the response scales for each statement in the survey questionnaire are 5-Strongly Agree, 4 –Agree Fairly Strongly, 3-Agree, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire items of the variables were modified from previous studies based on their relevance and appropriateness to the present study. Four (4) items on destination awareness strategies were modified from (Berieke,2013) while tourist destination choice was treated as a one dimensional construct involving 3 items were adapted from Krondic (2011).

Validity, Reliability and Analytical Techniques:

In this study, the various types of validity adopted were: face validity, convergent validity and discriminate validity. Face validity for the research instrument used was ascertained through expert opinions and contributions. Also, it was assessed by tourism experts such as tourist managers, tour operators and marketing scholars based on their experience in the industry and academia respectively. Reliability was determined using (i) Cronbach Alpha co-efficient (0.7 and above) and (iii) factor analysis, composite reliability and average variance extract as well as correlation matrix for testing how the combination of measures constituted valid and reliable factors. The descriptive data were analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores and other descriptive statistical measures, all in tables with the aid of the SPSS & Microsoft Excel. Regression analysis was used for the hypotheses. This analytical tool is often used to examine the existence of the linear relationship between a dependent variable and a set of (more than two) independent variables (Onodugo, Ugwuonah & Ebinne,2010). For this study, the multiple regression analysis was adopted to determine the predictive power of the independent variables (destination awareness strategies) in explaining tourists' holiday destination choice (dependent variable).

4.ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents:

As regards the category of visitors, 37 respondents (12%) were foreign while 271 respondents (88%) were domestic. This implies that domestic respondents were of the majority. Information on the type of visitors revealed that 36 respondents (12%) were companies staff, 10 respondents (3%) were Government officials, while (262) respondents (85%) were independent visitors. Therefore, independent visitors were of the majority. Section 3 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on the length of stay. The table revealed that (203) respondents (66%) stay for 1 day while (105) respondents (34%) stay for 2 – 5 days. This result points out that majority of the respondents stayed for 1 day. Section 4 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on age brackets of the respondents. 101 respondents (33%), were within 18-30 years, 83 respondents (27%) were within 31–40 years, 70 respondents (23%) were within 41–50 years while 54 respondents (17%) were greater than 51 years. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within the ages of 18 – 30 years. Section 5 of Table 4.2 shows the marital status of respondents. 169 respondents (56%) were single, 101 respondents (33%) were married, 20 respondents (6%) were divorced, while 18 respondents (5%) are separated. This information implies that majority of the respondents were single. Section 6 of Table 4.4 shows the gender of respondents. 172 respondents (56%) were male, while 136 respondents (44%) were female. This information implies that majority of the respondents were male.

Section 7 of Table 4.2 shows the educational background of respondents. FSLC (31) (10%), WASC/GCE (62) (20%), OND (48) (15%), B.Sc/HND (103) (33%), M.Sc/MBA (54) (17%), Ph.D (6) (2%), Others (10) (3%). From the information it shows that respondents with B.SC/HND are of the majority. Section 8 of Table 4.2 shows the state of origin of visitors. 227 respondents (74%) were from Akwa-Ibom, 51 respondents (17%) were from Cross River state, 8 respondents (6%) were from Rivers, 7 respondents (2%) were from South East, while 5 respondents (1%) were from Delta. From this information, it shows that respondents from Akwa-Ibom are of the majority. Section 9 of Table 4.2 shows the Nationality of respondents. 294 respondents (96%) were Nigerians, 10 respondents (3%) were from ECOWAS countries, while 4 respondents (1%) were Others. From the above information, it shows that respondents from Nigeria are of majority. Section 10 of Table 4.2 shows the purpose of the visit. 198 respondents (64%) came for Appreciation of nature/ leisure, 21 respondents (7%) came for Educational excursion, while 89 respondents (29%) came for Group meeting, thus, showing that respondents who came for Appreciation of nature/Leisure are of majority. Section 11 of Table 4.2 shows the frequency of visit. 139 respondents (45%) were first-time visitors, while 169 respondents (55%) were repeat-visitors. From this information, it shows that majority of the respondents were repeat

visitors. Section 12 of Table 4.2 shows the travel party. 62 respondents (20%) travelled alone, 91 respondents (30%) travelled with family/partner, 108 respondents (35%) travelled with friends/ relatives, while 47 respondents (15%) travelled with organized groups. From this information, it shows that majority of the respondents traveled with friends/relatives. Section 13 of Table 4.2 shows the Monthly Income of Visitors. 55 respondents (18%) earn less than ₦100,000, 163 respondents (53%) earn ₦101,000 – ₦200,000, while 90 respondents (29%) earn above ₦200,000. Thus, majority of respondents earn ₦101,000 to ₦200,000 monthly.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Destination Awareness and Tourist Choice

| Promotional Strategies | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|-----|--------|----------------|
| Advertising coverage in the mass media | 308 | 1.9091 | 1.07905 |
| Exposure in Social media | 308 | 2.4448 | 1.45962 |
| Positive word-of –mouth | 308 | 3.9578 | 1.09849 |
| Websites/Internet presence | 308 | 2.8734 | 1.18082 |
| Sales Promotional Incentives | 308 | 1.3726 | 1.03518 |
| Tourist Choice | 308 | 2.1526 | 2.30912 |

Information on table 1 above indicates the univariate statistical result for destination awareness capability through the application of descriptive statistics with statistical package for social science (SPSS). All the mean scores on the items were less than 3 except one item. Thus, an indication that respondent generally agreed on one of the items. The standard deviations were quite low, indicating that the responses were not far from each other. The grand mean of 3.9 > 3.0 is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale. This implies that respondents generally agreed on the positive word -of –mouth generated by previous beach visitors as their sources of awareness about the beaches. The non-agreement of the respondents with other items suggests that the beaches did not gain from radio and television media exposure in Nigeria, social media, search engines and sales promotional incentives. The low mean score on tourist choice implies low tourist response. Therefore, it could be argued that the non-chalant attitude of the government towards tourism development must have informed the promotional deficiencies of the destination operators as expressed by the poor exposure of the attraction sites in the domestic and international media.

Test of Hypotheses:

- Ho₁ Destination awareness through advertising does not have a positive and significant effect on tourist holiday destination choice in South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₂ Destination awareness through sales promotion does not have a positive and significant effect on tourist holiday destination choice in South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₃ Destination promotion through positive word-of-mouth does not have a positive and significant effect on tourist holiday destination choice in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary in Predicting Destination Choice
Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .896 ^a | .802 | .798 | .44104 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Destination Awareness

Table 3. ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 99.304 | 7 | 14.186 | 31.902 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 132.962 | 299 | .445 | | |
| | Total | 232.265 | 306 | | | |

- a. ependent variable: Destination Choice
- b. b.Predictor: (Constant), APDC

Table 2 shows that R is .896, which means that the independent variable is 89.6% correlated with the dependent variable. R square is .802; this implies that the independent variable will explain 80.2% of the dependent variable while the adjusted R square is .798. Simply put, the model summary is an indication that 80.2% of the variance in destination choice can be explained by the changes in independent variable (destination awareness).The R square statistic in the model is a measure used to measure the extent to which the total variation in the dependent variable is explained by the regression (Onudugo, Ugwuonah & Ebinne, 2010).

Table 3 shows that f-value is 31.902,which is greater than the mean square value (14.186), and the p-value is .000. As a general rule, this model is considered as a 'good fit' as it can explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: destination choice. What this means is that the regression model has made a significant fit with the data.

Table 5: Regression Analysis for Hypotheses Findings for the Model Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 (Constant) | 1.437 | .517 | | 2.782 | .006 |
| Advertising | .221 | .054 | .179 | 3.822 | .000 |
| Sales Promotion | .197 | .048 | .132 | 3.933 | .002 |
| Word-of-mouth | .264 | .156 | .195 | 3.995 | .001 |

- a. Dependent variable: Destination Choice
- b. b. Predictor: (Constant), Advertising, sales promotion, Word-of-mouth

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine which element of destination promotion had a significant effect on destination choice. The first and most contributory variable of destination choice in own context is positive word-of-mouth. As the table shows, destination awareness through word-of-mouth promotion (WOMP) beta value (β) is.195, suggesting that destination awareness predicts 19.5% of destination choice. The P-value is .001< 0.05). This implies that destination promotion by word-of-mouth (referrals) has a positive and significant influence on destination choice thereby supporting the alternative hypothesis. The second contributory variable that predicts destination choice is advertising. The test result in the above table indicates that destination awareness through advertising (DAA) beta value (β) is.179, suggesting that destination awareness through advertising media predicts 17.9% of destination choice. The P-value is .000< 0.05). This implies that destination awareness created by advertising has a positive and significant influence on destination choice. The third contributory variable that explains destination choice in the context of this study is sales promotion. Table 2 indicates that destination awareness through sales promotion (DASP) beta value (β) is.132, suggesting that destination awareness predicts 13.2% of destination choice. The P-value is .002< 0.05). This implies that destination awareness created by sales promotion has a positive and significant influence on destination choice thereby supporting the alternative hypothesis.

5.DISCUSSION

The finding of this study indicates that promotional campaign in the mass media, necessary for the creation of awareness for the beaches as a tourism resource was minimal. In the same vein, destination awareness capability had a positive and significant effect on tourist choice of beach tourism in Akwa Ibom State, meaning that low tourist arrivals were greatly influenced by the low destination awareness generated about the beaches. The results are consistent with previous studies which established that destination promotion strategies have a positive and significant effect on tourist choice and patronage tourist organizations in several geographical locations of the globe (Oyebode, 2017; Chacko, 1997; Bhatia 2012; Mary 2012, Micallef et al., 2011; Williams 2009). The finding is equally consistent with the results of other studies carried out in other market contexts (e.g.,Adejumo 2016; Nbinye 2014; Sunday & Boyode 2015; Owusu-Ansah & Poku 2013).

Destination awareness strategies describe the development deployment t of effective communicating channels with relevant stakeholders to enhance awareness, thereby persuading potential tourists to visit the destination. As our analysis reveals, positive word-of-mouth, the popularity of the beach and the presence of one of the beaches on the internet (Ibeno beach) were the channels through which visitors became of the beaches. The low mean score (1.9091) on one of the items suggests that the beaches were not given adequate coverage in the 'mass media' such as radio, television, newspapers and brochures as well as social media, reflecting the incompetence of the beach management in designing a cost-effective promotional mix for the destinations.

The ability or inability of beach managers to create awareness about the tourist sites and the associated product/service offerings has a significant influence on tourists' expectations, choice and patronage with attendant consequences for tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. This empirical evidence underscores the importance of effective promotion in tourism destination competitiveness performance. The finding of the study, therefore, places a responsibility on Akwa Ibom Ministry of Culture and Tourism to develop and implement a good mix of promotional strategy for beaches and other tourist attraction sites in the state using appropriate media. As noted by Middleton and Clarke (2011), promotion strategy entails devising and implementing promotional programmes to communicate destination images and key messages to target segments of potential visitors.

6.CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study has evaluated the effect of destination awareness on tourist beaches in Akwa Ibom State from the tourists' perspective. The results of the empirical analysis have revealed that destination awareness generated by promotion strategies is an important factor in predicting tourists' choice of beach destinations. Accordingly, the study concludes that tourist choice is also a function of the quality of the destination promotion strategies which reflect deficiencies or capabilities of the beach managers. Therefore, this study has provided an answer to the research question: " how does destination promotion capability affect tourist's choice of beach tourism in Akwa Ibom in Nigeria?]. The findings of this study are very important to both academic researchers and tourism practitioners, with regards to consumer behavior towards tourist products..

Furthermore, this study provides a better understanding of tourists' behaviour towards the development of destination promotion capability of tourism service providers and the destination marketing organizations towards the achievement of destination marketing objectives. Thus, the empirical evidence of this study offers actionable information to all tourism destination stakeholders; based on the fact that the tourism product is an amalgam of several individual products which contribute to the memorable tourism experience of tourists to achieve marketing objectives.

The findings and conclusion of the study hold some implications for Akwa –Ibom State government as follow:

- i. The Akwa-Ibom State Ministry of Culture and Tourism should utilize local and national mass media and printed brochures to create awareness about the destinations.
- ii. The beach management in collaboration with the Akwa-Ibom State government should endeavour to create effective website for all the tourist destinations to showcase their product/service offerings and take visitors review as a way of monitoring visitors' satisfaction.
- iii. The destination operators should adopt collaborative promotion to communicate their destination offers to potential customers for improved patronage through increased tourist arrivals and spending. In the same vein, the new media platforms (social media) should also be utilized by destination stakeholders for wider destination awareness.

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