

Marketing Edo State as a Destination for Tourism

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Abstract

This study is an exploratory study on marketing Edo State as a destination for tourism. Despite Edo State's natural endowments with rich tourist sites throughout the geopolitical zones and great cultural diversity, the industry is yet to receive adequate attention in terms of policy formulation and implementation by the state government by giving the tourism sector its desired priority in terms of development and marketing strategy for a local attraction. The study aims to identify some major tourist destinations that could be marketed in Edo state, Nigeria. In the actualization of this objective, numerous tourist attraction centres and their locations were where identified. The study proposed the use of marketing strategies to create awareness and commercialize these centres to enhance the well-being and economic life of individuals, businesses and the state. The study opines that this will in no small measure bring about the development of tourism in Edo state as it will contribute to the socio-economic development of the people and state by boosting government revenue and increasing incomes for individuals and businesses. It will also help in employment generation to support businesses in the industry and ensure rapid business growth and economic development. The study recommends the use of marketing strategies such as Product development, and digital marketing through the use of social media and publicity aids – books, periodicals, brochures, posters, hand-outs, press releases, audio-visuals, websites, as well as sales promotion, advertising methods, and public relations which need to meet international standards. In addition, stakeholders such as the state government, the community and business organisations should be involved in the development and marketing of tourism in Edo State.

Keywords: Marketing, Destination, Tourism, Edo State

INTRODUCTION

Despite its growing importance, the tourism industry in Nigeria has not contributed significantly to economic growth when compared to other economic sectors. Nigeria continues to place a lot of emphasis on tourism in its efforts to diversify its economy away from oil production and into other industries that can bring in foreign exchange earnings (Osuma, Ikpefan, Osabohien, Ndigwe, & Nkwodimmah, 2018; Matthew, Ede, Osabohien, Ejemeyovwi, Ayanda & Okunbor, 2018). Nigeria is a multicultural nation with six geopolitical regions. The geopolitical zones consist of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The country has numerous tourist-friendly archaeological locations spread out among the six geopolitical zones. Each of Nigeria's 36 states has distinct social, cultural, historical and archaeological potentials that make them tourist hotspots. One of the 36 states, Edo State, is highly rich in cultural, social, historical and archaeological places and relics. A few examples include the Emotan Statue, the Royal Palace of the Oba of Benin, the Ojerami Dam, and Okomu Park (Nigerian Bulletin, 2021).

According to Nwanne (2017), Edo State is one of the six geopolitical zones that are naturally endowed with rich tourist sites, demonstrating Nigeria's cultural diversity and richness. Despite this, tourism potential has not been properly utilized to draw tourists and increase foreign exchange (Abdulrahman, Muhammad, & Muhammad, 2014). The poor marketing of tourism has been identified as a significant obstacle to the growth and development of the industry in Africa. (Aiyamenkhue, 2010 in Ifediba & Abada, 2021; Agina, 2018; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). Therefore, the broad objective of this study is concerned with marketing Edo State as a destination for tourists. In the actualization of this objective, numerous tourist attraction centres and their locations were identified. The study proposed the use of marketing strategies to create awareness and commercialize these centres to enhance the well-being and economic life of individuals, businesses and the state. The opines that the creation of awareness and commercialization of these centres will activate the tourism sector in the state and will enable the sector to contribute to the socio-economic development of the people and state, by boosting government revenue; increasing incomes for individuals and businesses by helping in employment generation to support businesses in the industry, and ensuring rapid business growth and economic development.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the major tourist attraction centres in Edo state and how to develop the centre by government, community and business organizations. Another objective is how to adopt some marketing strategies in developing the centres through promotion to bring about product awareness, changes in the features of the product, information about the quality of the product and persuasion to patronize the

product. Finally, the study will make recommendations that will enable the state government to actualize the objective of making Edo state a destination for tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Definition of Tourism Marketing

Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and United Nations Statistical Commission as the activities of individuals who travel to and remain in locations outside of their normal settings for more than one straight day for leisure, business and other objectives (Anyasor, Okocha, Agina & Nwankwo, 2021). Godfrey and Clarke (2000), cited in Ogunberu (2011), claim that the expansion of tourism marketing, which is both a process and a method, is responsible for the industry's rise. As a method, it entails applying the appropriate marketing concepts and ideologies to planning a strategy for attracting tourists to a specific destination which may take the form of a resort, city, region or country.

Tourism marketing is a process that comprises coming up with, organising, carrying out, pricing, promoting, and disseminating concepts, products, and services to facilitate exchanges that will satisfy both individual and organisational objectives. Marketing for tourism business is therefore focused on the marketing mix of product, place, pricing and promotion, and centres on planning for tourism from the demand and supply idea to please both visitors and communities (Kolb, 2006 cited in Ogunberu, 2011).

Ray, Das and Kumar (2018) note that there are various aspects of tourism such as economic, social, demographic, technological, geographic, cultural, and so forth and that tourist attractions are expanding across all of these facets. Therefore, making dynamic and forward-thinking moves is crucial because tourism today strongly emphasizes rural areas that have not been explored in the framework of socio-economic goals.

Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert and Wanhill (2018) stated that whereas domestic tourism encompasses actions of a resident tourist within the nation of reference either as part of a domestic trip or as part of an outbound voyage. Domestic tourism is different from outward, inbound, national, and international tourism. Over 80% of tourists engage in this kind of activities. Outbound Tourism refers to the activities of resident tourists carried outside the country of reference, either as part of an international or domestic vacation. The actions of a non-resident visitor inside a nation are referred to as Inbound Tourism while the actions of resident and non-resident tourists inside a country as part of local or international journeys are referred to as internal tourism, which also covers domestic tourism and inbound tourism. The actions of resident tourists inside and beyond the reference country as part of either internal or outbound journeys are collectively referred to as national tourism (Fletcher et al., 2018). International tourism encompasses both

inbound and outbound travel that is specifically made by citizens of the country of origin on a domestic or international trip (Fletcher et al., 2018).

Tourism marketing refers to the techniques for using the appropriate marketing ideologies and concepts to develop a strategy to draw tourists to certain destinations, which may include resorts, cities, regions or entire countries. It is a procedure for organizing and carrying out conception which includes pricing, marketing, and distribution of concepts, products and services or a procedure for determining customer satisfaction, designing a product that will satisfy them, and distributing it to the final consumer (Ifediba & Abada, 2021).

Significance of Tourism to Economic Development

The travel and tourism sector has continued to grow and diversify over the past 60 years, and as one of the biggest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, it continues to improve the lives of millions of people by generating jobs, lowering poverty levels, and promoting tolerance and development (World Tourism Organization, 2010; Anyasor et al., 2021).

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2016) notes that for any country to fully benefit from what international tourism has to offer in terms of job creation, infrastructure development and poverty alleviation, it is necessary to embrace the conditions that make travel and tourism accessible. This entails facilitating tourist access to a specific location through accommodating visa laws and processes as well as other crucial travel documents like passports.

With the improvements to physical and social infrastructure, economic growth, the creation of direct and indirect job opportunities, the reduction of current account deficits across countries, and increased tax revenue for the government, tourism is one of the largest industries in the world economy, accounting for about 18% of all economic activities. It has also been recognized as a safe haven industry for both developed and developing nations (Adeleye, Osabuohien, Bowale, Matthew, & Oduntan, 2017; Matthew et al., 2010; Dogru & Bulut, 2018).

World Travel and Tourism Council (2021) however, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on communities across the world and has had a devastating effect on Travel & Tourism. However, because of the proactive measures taken by various governments worldwide, the sector has successfully safeguarded millions of jobs and ways of life that were in danger through retention programmes; otherwise, the statistics would be far worse. Yet, with the sector's contribution to GDP expected to fall by over 50% in 2020, assistance from public authorities is more important than ever.

History, People, Climate, Culture and Tourist Products (sites) in Edo State

The former Benin Empire was the historical ancestor of the present-day Edo State. The capital of Edo is Benin City. It is situated in the Southern part of the nation (Nigeria) and dates back to the 11th century AD. The British Empire carried out a vengeful expedition against the empire in 1897, demolishing the majority of the historic city of Edo and absorbing the region into what would become the Southern Nigeria Protectorate. It was home to some of the oldest earthworks in the world. The current Edo (Edo State), one of the 36 states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was formed in 1991 from the ruins of the former Bendel State. It shares boundaries with Ondo State to the west, Kogi State to the northeast, Anambra State to the east and Delta State to the southeast. With a population of 3,233,366 as of 2006, Edo State was listed as the 24th most populous state by the National Population Commission. The contemporary boundaries of the state include areas that were formerly home to numerous empires and kingdoms. The fourth-largest city in Nigeria, Benin City, serves as Edo State's capital (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

As the hub of the Niger Delta Region, Edo State is a landlocked state in central Southern Nigeria. Except for its northern axis, Edo State is low-lying. Here, the Northern and Esan Plateaus rise to heights of 672 metres in the Somorika Hills and 183 metres in the Kukuruku Hills. The state is bordered to the north by Kogi State, the east and south by Delta State, the west by Ekiti State, and the northwest by Ondo State. It has a land mass of 19,794 km² (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The two main seasons are wet (rainy) and dry (Harmattan), which are typical of tropical climates. The wet season lasts from April to November, and the dry season is from December to March. Benin, Ekpoma, Auchi, Uromi, Ubiaja, Ewu, Igarra, Abudu, Irrua, Okpella, Uzebba, Afuze, Ibillo, Urhonigbeand Sabongida-Ora are some further significant cities and towns (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

According to Lois (2020) and the Nigerian Bulletin (2021) tourist attraction centres in Edo State include the following:

- 1. Ogba Zoological Garden:** The Ogba Zoological Garden, which was founded in 1965 and is located in a forest reserve in Ogba village, about 6 kilometres from Benin City, is noted for its variety of wildlife (both local and foreign species), many of which are uncommon in other areas of the nation.
- 2. Benin Brass Work:** Being the home of the best bronze casters in West Africa, Benin City is renowned as the hub of bronze and brass artwork in Africa. It is also one of the most spectacular works of art in the world. The main centre for this work is located at Igun Street in Benin City.
- 3. Okomu National Park:** Ovia South Local Government Area in Edo State is home to the Okomu National Park. The park, which is about 45 kilometres west of Benin City, is

home to many different species of animals, including white-throated monkeys, forest elephants, buffaloes, red river hogs, chimpanzees, leopards, bush babies, putty-nosed guenons, porcupines, pangolins, duikers, antelopes, and butterflies

.4. Oba's Palace, Benin City: The Oba's Palace is a hub for historical landmarks and is located in the city's centre. Its history stretches back to 900 A.D., and after being destroyed by British soldiers in 1897, it was reconstructed in 1914. The current palace, which is about one-tenth the size of the old structure that was levelled in 1897, is a museum of Benin history where visitors may view examples of crafts and culture as well as artworks that reflect historical events.

5. Benin City Wall and Moat: The Benin City Wall and moats, popularly referred to as "Iya" in southern Nigeria, are among the most magnificent city walls and moats in the entire world. They were built as a defensive barrier surrounding the city. The majority of the fortifications were demolished by the British during their 1897 invasion of Benin. Even today, a section of the original city wall may be seen in Benin City along Murtala Muhammad Way.

6. Benin City Museum: A national museum founded in 1973, the Benin City Museum is situated in the centre of the roundabout at King's Square. The world-famous bronze sculptures from the ancient Benin Kingdom are among the most prized antiquities it is home to, along with other treasures like terracotta, ivory carvings, and cast-iron objects.

7. Igun Bronze Casters and Crafts Centre, Igun: The top artists and craftspeople in the Benin Kingdom create their works in this centre, which is where bronze is cast into crafts. It is also located at Igun Street in Benin City

8. Edo Cultural Dance: Benin City is endowed with fascinating and magnificent dances that feature the most vibrant costumes, which enhance the performers' beauty. The opportunity to learn more about Benin culture would be provided by a trip to Benin City. This cultural group is based in the Benin Cultural centre.

9. Victor Uwaifor Art Gallery, Benin: Victor Uwaifor, a well-known singer and artist, owns this gallery, which features a variety of artwork and handicrafts.

10. NIFOR Estate, Benin: NIFOR was created by the Nigerian Federal Government as a research laboratory to identify the best practices for raising oil palm, coconut, and other agricultural seedlings. On a big plot of land where this research centre is situated, there are also oil palm and coconut plantations, a processing facility, a lab, nursery cribs, and housing quarters. This facility provided the seedlings that were planted and cultivated in Malaysia.

- 11. Ososo Tourist Center:** Ososo is a steep, rocky town that sits on the line separating the states of Kogi and Edo. On top of a hill near Ososo, there is a non-catering rest home that offers an expansive and breath-taking view of several regions of Kogi state.
- 12. Somorika Hill:** Somorika Hill, which shares a border with Kogi state in the north, has a gorgeous landscape.
- 13. Okomu National Park:** The park, which is located in Ovia South LGA and is 45 km west of Benin City, is home to a variety of animals, including forest elephants, buffaloes, red river pigs, chimpanzees, leopards, bush babies, putty-nosed guenons, porcupines, pangolins, duikers, and It's one of the best spots in Nigeria for bird viewing because there are so many butterflies and birds there.
- 14. Sand Beaches of Agenebode:** The Agenebode Sand Beaches are situated in the Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. On the banks of the River Niger, the white-sand beach of Agenebode is the perfect location for picnics, relaxing, and unwinding with excellent lodging for guests.
- 15. Sakpoba Holiday Resort:** About 45 kilometres from Benin City, Sakpoba Holiday Resort is a colonial village that offers a wide range of leisure activities to visitors. It is located in the centre of the Sokponba forest reserve.
- 16. Ramat Park:** Ramat Park: The Park, which bears General Murtala Ramat Mohammed's name, is almost triangular in shape and has three edges. The first edge, on the left, connects Ikpoba Slope to Akpakpava Street in the city centre. The second edge, on the lower right, connects Agbor Road to the eastern states through Delta State. The third edge, on the upper right, connects Auchi Road to the north.
- 17. Iyoma, Iyafun and Ozalla Springs:** These springs are in Ozalla in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State.
- 18. Udo Tourist Centre:** The Udo Tourist Center, which also functions as a government retreat, is situated about fifteen kilometres from Ubiaja in the Udo Forest Reserve in Udo Village in the Igueben Local Government Area of Edo State. The centre was created from the Forestry Rest House, which was constructed in the 1970s by a prominent forest conservator. It features a wildlife park and is home to some exotic animals provided by the late President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya.
- 19. Lampese Crocodile Lakes:** Tourists can watch crocodiles thrillingly emerge from the Lampese Crocodile Lake in Akoko-Edo Local Government, Edo State, Nigeria at sunset. It is a tranquil savannah with a lovely sandy cover overlooked by pleasant and sheltered vegetation and it is also perfect for fishing, safaris, and many other tourist activities. Regrettably, the lake does not receive much attention from the government or private investors.
- 20. Ughoton Grave:** According to Oronsaye (1995), cited in Ediagbonya, Ughoton, also known as Gwatto to Europeans, is located about 42 kilometres southeast of Benin

City. Prince Ekaladerhan, the only child of Ogiso Owodo of the Benin Kingdom and the last Ogiso of the Ogiso dynasty, founded Ughoton in the eleventh century. It is the cemetery where a number of the graves of European missionaries, traders, and tourists are located.

21. **Gelegele Fountains:** Gelegele Village is in the Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, and is home to the Gelegele Fountains. The settlement, which borders Ughoton village and is located on the left bank of the Ovia River, is famous for its seaport, which was established by Oba Ewuare the Great before European explorers arrived in the Great Benin Kingdom.
22. **Amahor Waterside:** *Amahor waterside* is located in the town of Amahor, Igueben Local Government Area of Edo State. It is situated along the Niger River's banks and offers a tranquil, welcoming atmosphere with incredibly friendly locals. It is a treasure trove of water sports, miles of River walks, parks, unhindered water vistas, and the most magnificent sunsets, making it perfect for visitors or tourists seeking a peaceful and tranquil natural setting.

Tourism Marketing and Management in Edo State

Zins (1987) cited in Iqbal, Ramachandran, Siow, Subramaniam, and Afandi (2022) define tourism marketing as a process where the design of a product (service), physical distribution, the determination of exchange value (pricing), and communication between the tourism organisation and its market are all done for the benefit of the business and customers, define tourism marketing. These criteria encapsulate the core of tourism marketing, which is anticipating and satisfying visitor demands while generating revenue for the service provider. Most tourism marketing programmes are geared toward attracting and keeping the consumer interest in tourism products as to the specific tourism potential (Ispas & Saragi, 2011). It is imperative to adopt tourism marketing in improving the fortunes of Edo state from the tourism sector to benefit from the sector. To actualize this, the government and the community and all stakeholders must be involved in developing the product (tourist centres and services rendered at the centres). These identified centres must be developed and continuously maintain to meet the international standard.

The government of Edo state should be interested in this development by providing adequate infrastructure and funds to upgrade them to international standards. In addition, the community must be carried along in the development of these centres through active participation. Iqbal et al. (2022) opined that meaningful community participation is the key to the sustainable development of tourism at any destination. They further stated that meaningful community participation should be complemented by socio-economic and political empowerment at tourist destinations.

The government and businesses that will be involved in managing tourism in Edo State should participate in marketing campaigns like travel advertising on worldwide television, the internet, and on the websites and social media pages of national tourism organisations. These nations' tourism advertisements, websites, and social media platforms are correctly designed to highlight the local people and cultures, sights and sounds, an interactive platform, and mobile apps as well as the tourism potential of their nations. Okocha, Agina, and Ojiula (2021) stated that marketing organisations should use marketing methods to enhance the overall tourist package's appeal, affordability, and satisfaction while also projecting the destination's image on a global scale.

The pricing should be of international standard. However, a discriminatory pricing policy could be adopted where the local tourists are charged in local currency while the foreign tourists are charged both in local and foreign currency. This is because of the difficulty in securing foreign currency in Nigeria.

Another important aspect of marketing Edo State as a destination for tourism is through promotion. Promotion is a means of communicating to the consumer about a product. Promotion helps to bring about product awareness, changes in the features of the product, information about the quality of the product and persuasion to patronize the product. These identified tourist centres in Edo state can be promoted through digital marketing which involves the use of social media and publicity aids; books, periodicals, brochures, posters, hand-outs, press releases, audio-visuals, websites, as well as sales promotion, advertising, and public relations. The local and foreign awareness of these centres will attract both local and foreign tourists. This will not only generate revenue for individuals, communities and the state government but will also boost economic activities mostly in the area of hospitality, transportation and food vendors.

Benefits of Tourism in Edo State

Tourism if well developed in Edo state will not only generate employment but also bring the state into international visibility. According to Odia and Agbonifoh (2017), tourism promotes international visibility, understanding, and goodwill among the many different peoples who make up the world. It can also act as a catalyst for improving employment prospects, foreign exchange, and infrastructure. Moreover, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2016) estimates that travel and tourism contributed 9.6% of all employment in 2016 (292,220,000 jobs), including jobs that were indirectly supported by the sector. This percentage is predicted to increase to 11.1% of all employment in 2027, or 381,700,000 jobs, by increasing at a rate of 2.5% per year. Previous studies have shown that the tourist industry still has a very small impact on job creation in Nigeria as the sector's proportion of overall employment fluctuated over the years, falling from 4.9% in 2005 to 2.7% in 2014 (Yusuff & Akinde, 2015; Dogru & Bulut, 2018). In addition to employment generation, it will also bring about an increase in revenue

generation for the government, community and business especially in the area of hotel services, transportation and food vendors. Tourism will also bring about improvements to physical and social infrastructure such as good roads, a constant electricity supply, a good communication network and an effective transportation system. Previous studies have shown that tourism brings about improvements to physical and social infrastructure, economic growth, the creation of direct and indirect job opportunities, reduction of current account deficits across countries, and increased tax revenue for the government (Adeleye, Osabuohien, Bowale, Matthew & Oduntan, 2017; Matthew et al., 2010; Dogru & Bulut, 2018). Edo State will no doubt be a beneficiary of these benefits if the tourist centres located in the state are well developed and managed.

Orekoya (2018) asserts that to guide global development until 2030, world leaders adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and tourism is essential to achieving the SDGs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are as follows: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, inexpensive and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, decreased inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships (Orekoya, 2018).

The Challenges of the Tourism Industry in Edo State

A significant contributor to the failure of many new tourist operations is the fact that many business owners undervalue the challenges and expenses of distributing tourism products. Most of the tourist centres identified in Edo State are managed by the government. Business organisations see it as a waste of investment that cannot generate the desired revenue or profit. Hence, they do not see the need to invest in the sector. In addition, numerous activities are involved in marketing tourism, yet many business people are unaware of the market dynamics that exist in this sector. (Carey & Font, 2005 cited in Adekiya, 2016). Most of the tourist centres in Edo State are not widely publicized except the Ogba Zoo and the Okomu National Park (Agianaku & Aigbokhan, 2018; Osunsina, & Ajibola, 2017). In this regard, the Edo State government should collaborate with the Ministry of External Affairs, Culture and the Nigerian Tourism Development Agency to bring these tourist centres both to the local and international limelight.

According to Carey and Font (2005) cited in Adekiya (2016) a detailed examination of the market resources, competitors, and the tourism business environment is the first step in the efficient management of tourism and leisure (which includes marketing). The second step is making a strategic decision about how to segment the available tourism markets, choose the markets to be targeted, plan an appropriate product positioning, and finally, choose the marketing mix for presenting the product to tourists. This includes

deciding on the price that will be charged, how the product will be distributed, and how it will be communicated.

Another challenge confronting the development of tourism in Edo state is the lack of funding and neglect by the state government. Though the government in 2020 had launched the state tourism masterplan, targeting about N2 trillion from the sector in the next 10 years. The government stated that the masterplan was designed to make the state a global tourism destination. The government further stated that is a thoroughly designed plan to make the state the choice destination among global tourists (Premium Times, 2022). However, not much had been seen from the master plan at the present.

The other challenges confronting tourism in Edo State have been well articulated by Nadube and Akahome (2017), who opined that the lack of consumer interest in leisure activities, security issues, poor maintenance of tourist attractions, poorly implemented policies, a lack of qualified and trained hospitality staff, the destination's poor facility aesthetics, low consumer purchasing power, political unrest and violence, a high rate of crimes against humanity, a poor road network, and a lack of supply are some of the main infrastructures are obstacles to the development of tourism in Nigeria. Edo State as one of the states in Nigeria is not exonerated from these factors. Indeed, the growth of tourism in Edo state in particular and Nigeria in general is negatively impacted by security issues and criminal activity. In addition, an uptick in violent crimes, as well as ethnic and religious disputes, is likely to deter travellers and tourism.

Adekiya (2013) stated that in Nigeria, where tourism policy advocates that financial incentives must be made available to participants in the tourism industry, hotel operators still face multiple taxes from Federal, State, and Local governments.

Tourism is one of the industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2021). For instance, according to data from the UNWTO, the number of foreign tourist arrivals decreased by 84% between March and December 2020 compared to the prior year. This had an impact on agriculture, which as a result of its connections to other sectors, suffered a 2.5-fold loss in real GDP. The economic losses are predicted to range between \$1.7 trillion and \$2.4 trillion in 2021 based on three scenarios (an optimistic, a pessimistic, and one that takes into account the asymmetric speed of vaccinations), which highlights the significance of the vaccine rollout in reviving international travel among other mitigating measures (UNCTAD, 2021). Uncertainty, racial and religious considerations, ineffective and inefficient tourism legislation, bad administration, and inadequate promotion of our tourism potential and offerings. Finally, other obstacles that must be overcome for the development of tourism in Edo state include political instability, for instance, change in the different political parties in power in the state. This is because every party has their manifesto and this may affect the continuity of any tourism plan in

the state. Other factors include ineffective and inefficient tourism regulations, poor management, and poor marketing of our tourism potential and products (Bello & Bello, 2012; Bello & Bello, 2017; Amalu, Phil-Eze, & Ajake, 2019).

Theoretical Review

Theory of Self-Expression

According to Orekoya (2018), the theory of self-expression was propounded by Elmer and Bernard in 1973. Tourism is primarily a result of the drive for self-expression, and that man is perceived as an active dynamic creature with a need to find an outlet for his energy to use his ability and to express his personality. Self-expression is how we embrace who we are, all the way from the positive traits and acts we keep on the surface to the darker and less valued pieces of ourselves that we bury deep inside. The particular activity in which a man engages is impacted by his physiological and anatomical make-up, level of physical fitness, environment, family, and social background among other things. Self-expression is one of the attitudes and behaviours of tourists which are shaped by man's wishes that are independent of their colour, sex, religion, or ethnicity, and travellers' perception of pleasure is greatly influenced by their ability to express themselves freely and improve their self-image. It is important that marketer recognizes these attitudes and design their products towards meeting these tourists' expectation.

Tourism System

According to IGIGlobal (2021), the term tourism system refers to a collection of interconnected, interdependent, and interacting elements of three basic types, such as tourists, geographical elements (traveller generating region, tourist destination region, and transit route region), and tourism industry. These elements collectively form a single functional structure or a complex socio-economic system, which is made up of three subsystems (administration, management, and services supply; distribution and promotion; demand/consumption) and several others

Weaver and Oppermann (2000) in Ray et al. (2018), asserted that the basis of a functional tourism system is supply and demand, which may take the form of current or potential customers and may come from the local, national, or international markets alone or in combination. Customers within markets may have general interests, such as tourists or leisure seekers, or they may have special interests that must be satisfied. This study believes that these three subsystems (administration, management, and services supply, distribution and promotion) will play a prominent role in harnessing the potential of the tourist centres in Edo State.

Empirical Review

Digun-Aweto, Fawole and Van Der Merwe (2019) examine the level of satisfaction with nature tourism among visitors to Okomu National Park (ONP) in Edo State, Nigeria, utilizing questionnaires distributed randomly to park visitors aimed at discovering the key factors impacting visitor satisfaction at national parks. The study's findings indicate that to increase visitor happiness, national park managers must focus on the correct management of the flora and wildlife, including the interpretation of natural elements.

Ajake (2015) evaluated tourism destination attractions and the influence of marketing strategies and communication tools on tourists' choice of destination area by analysing tourism destination attractions and the influence of marketing strategies and communication tools on tourists' choice of destination area in Cross River State, Nigeria. Primary data from questionnaires, interviews, and observation were collected from 215 respondents, consisting of tourists and staff of GOTs and PTSPs. According to the study, a substantial portion of tourists engaged in leisure/recreational parks and historical site/museum activities, out of the six types of activities they might choose to engage in while visiting the place. Additionally, there was a significant correlation between the level of attractiveness of tourist attractions and events, indicating a high level of attractiveness of tourism products in the destination area. As a result, the higher the responses on the level of attractiveness of a product, the higher the population of tourists at that attraction site. Additionally, it was discovered that the selection of a destination attraction was based on the quality of the programmes used to promote the attractions through marketing channels including radio, television, the internet, magazines, and newspapers, among others.

Odia and Agbonifo (2017) examined the determinants of the perceived image of the Nigerian tourism industry in their article titled "Determinants of the perceived image of the Nigerian tourism industry," which also looked at the demographic factors that affect the perception of the sector. They used a questionnaire with twelve key evaluative factors to measure the image of the NTI and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a T-test for equality of means to measure the perceived image of the NTI. The study found that the mean index obtained for the perception of the tourism industry was fairly positive, and the most reputable in the areas of hospitality under the culture and heritage dimension; and weak under the infrastructure dimension, and that the demographic characteristics of respondents were not significant in explaining the overall perception of NTI.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The tourism potentials of Edo State have not been adequately marketed for economic and social benefits. This study was concerned with the marketing tourism in Edo state by identifying the tourism centres and their potentials in Edo State, it also discussed how the government, community and business organization can harness these resources and facilities in marketing Edo State a destination for tourism and to enable the sector

contribute positively to the social and economic development of the people and the state. The study identified tourism as one of the best-positioned economic sectors to drive socio-economic growth, promote peace and understanding, provide sustainable livelihoods for men, women and youths in local and regional communities, and help to protect the environment. The study concludes that tourism programmes need to be developed in Edo State to empower the tourism sector to benefit entrepreneurs and local communities. Marketing of the revenue potentials of Edo State and other programmes such as strong partnerships with local and international organizations needs to be forged to transform the tourism industry and generate employment to reduce poverty in Edo State.

- The government of Edo State in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria need to ensure a nationwide infrastructure rehabilitation programme that must include tourism-related infrastructure such as roads, pipe-borne water, amusement parks, museums, electricity, internet and communication facilities, and good support businesses like hotels and relaxation joints amongst others that can help in easy marketing and rendition of services to the consumers (tourists) through public-private-partnership programmes (PPP).
- The Edo State government should embark on promotional campaigns, advertisements and good public relations that should be centred on the advancement of the travel industry given its immense tourism attraction potential. One of such way is for the Edo State government to adopt aggressive marketing strategies for its tourism products, and should focus such marketing strategies on key tourism source markets such as European Union, the United Kingdoms, United States, the Caribbean, West Africa, South America etc., and the use of international media, internet and other available technological tools in creating awareness and reach out to prospects.
- The Edo State government in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs, Culture and the Nigerian Tourism Development Agency should cooperate and work in harmony for the benefit of tourists flowing to Nigeria and indeed Edo State. For instance, strict regulations on tourist entry visas must be reviewed to appropriately comply with what is obtained in popular tourist countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, France and the United Arab Emirates, and the use of technology such as online based platforms for tourists who wish to apply for visas to come to Nigeria by the Federal Government or relevant agencies.
- The Edo State government should create tourism entrepreneurial programmes locally, including support opportunities for ancillary businesses for harnessing the potential existing in the tourism and hospitality industry through the creation of a tourism value chain, promotion of the tourist sites and creating awareness of the benefits of tourism sector to the communities where such sites are located.

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