

Effect of Customer Experience on Tourist Satisfaction: Evidence from South West, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The concept of 'customer experience' has evolved as an imperative area of study within the marketing discipline. Despite its importance and the positive attention this concept has received during the last few years, the explanation of customer experiences have remained vague and lack a thorough theoretical foundation. Thus, the creation of good customer experience among tourists is very for the survival of tourist destinations. Since there are scanty studies exploring the relationship between customer experience and tourist satisfaction in Nigeria, we have selected this study to evaluate the effect of customer experience on tourist satisfaction in South West, Nigeria

Material and Method: A structured questionnaire was administered to 600 tourists to the six purposively selected tourism destinations and only 519 responded to the questionnaire with only 477 found usable. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency, mean, standard deviation and also inferential statistics such as factor analysis, regression analysis and t-test statistics. All analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.

Results: The findings revealed that cognitive emotional, physical, sensory and social constructs are significant determinants of tourist satisfaction ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study concluded with the assertion that to have positive and favorable destination image and reputation destination managers must build memorable customer experience that would lead to favorable word of mouth by the tourists.

Keywords. Tourists, Destination, Emotion, Customer experience, Satisfaction

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I. Introduction

Tourism has become a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that became recognized as a major domain of contemporary life, a huge international industry, reaching out into ever more remote corners of the world, and preparing to reach into space. The culture of tourism is rooted in imaginaries of escaping everyday life routine of discovering the unknown and unfamiliar (Salazar, 2012). Thus, tourism is more than physical travel but the preparation of the tourists to see other places as objects of tourism, and the preparation of those people and places to be seen. The tourists have extremely greater expectations and as such they require an extraordinary level of customer experience and satisfaction. In other words, tourism depends in part upon the successful management of tourist behaviors and experiences (Moore, Smallman, Wilson and Simmons 2012) since there is nothing more central to marketing than consumption, and nothing more central to consumption than consumers (Barmola and Srivastava, 2010).. Tourism as a business subset requires knowledge of how it is produced and consumed so that it can be managed effectively (Sharpley and Stone 2012). Tourism is therefore regarded as a complex production and consumption system involving commodities, goods, services, experiences and ideas (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005).⁴

Corte et al. (2015) stated that the positive experience with the tourist services and others facilities given by the tourism destination management, can encourage traveler memory and increase positive communication among customers about destination. Customers constantly have an experience, whether bad, good or indifferent when they buy product or service from firms (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994). The main point is how well the firm handles the experience.

Nigeria's GDP in 2019 was \$448.1 billion with a per capital of \$2,229.9 compared to \$1.397 trillion and per capital of \$52,726 in Australia, \$14.34.10 trillion and a per capital of &10,261.68 in China, \$2.716 trillion and a per capital income of \$40,493 in France, £2.172 trillion and per capital of £43,688 in England, \$3.861 trillion and a per capital of &46,473 in Germany, (World Bank Data, 2019). World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) also estimates that tourism's contribution of Nigeria to national GDP is 4.5 percent and its performance in the tourism sector when compared to other African countries such as Algeria 5.7%, Egypt 9.3%,

Morocco 12.0%, Tunisia 13.9% and Botswana 12.6%, is aberrant and this should be of concern to the relevant authorities.

In spite of the socio-economic importance of tourism to the world economy, the Nigerian experience from the above analysis reveals that tourism has not contributed significantly to the economic development of Nigeria. This is attested to by Ovat (2003) who found that (i) the domestic demand for local tourist attraction is low, (ii) the demand for foreign tourism is low and (iii) foreign demand for domestic tourism is also very low. Consequently, one of the major reasons for Nigeria being unable to compete with the fellow African countries is the non-application of marketing strategies especially in the areas of customer experience. Iyiola and Akintunde (2011) argue that a great deal of work has not been done in Nigeria's tourism marketing, owing to its characteristics such as intangible and immobile, and that efficient and sustainable marketing strategies are of particular value to Nigeria's tourism business. Therefore tourism destination should put into consideration marketing strategy such as creation of memorable customer experience that can properly position tourism product locally, nationally and internationally.

The idea of providing rich and unforgettable experiences for visitors has thus become a recent idea in the tourism industry. Although tourism experience has been an integral part of tourism research and development since the 1960s (Uriely, 2005), It has only received significant attention among scholars, at the turn of the 21st century,. This has been demonstrated in a wealth of recent literature attesting the unabated significance of the principle to the theory and practice's (Carmichael, 2005; Jennings and Nickerson, 2006; Morgan et al., 2010; Ryan, 2010; Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Sfandla and Björk, 2013; Dalonso et al., 2014; Sørensen and Jensen, 2015). Thus, "customer experience management approach" is a comparatively new method to enhance customer orientation and eventual customer satisfaction and loyalty (Palmer, 2010).

Cognitive Element

The cognitive aspect refers to a person's assumptions about the distinctive characteristics of a tourist destination (Baloglu&McCleary1999; Pike & Ryan, 2004). .According to APA, (2016), the cognitive element of customer experience refers to the higher mental processes, such as vision, memory, vocabulary, problem solving, and abstract thought. Cognitive elements can be examined using two distinct situations: achievement of objectives and (dis)confirmation of prior experience: anticipations.

The first view is rooted in the belief that consumers are goal-directed. In this particular situations, consumers set targets either consciously or unconsciously and use consumption as an instrument to achieve them (Bagozzi &Dholakia, 1999). The second view is based on the suggestion that customers have standards prior to choosing a service. The study examining satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which is a result of confirmation or disconfirmation, covered if real consumer encounters confirm or disconfirm such prior expectations (e.g., Gentil et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2006). Some customer experience metrics are based on evidence, according to Gentil et al. (2007), and measure the cognitive portion of the experience with, for example, the functionality, speed, or availability of accessories for a specific product and/or service.

Emotional Element

Emotions can be seen as a type of a multidimensional and multifarious overall customer experience in which many experiences are generated (Verhoef et al., 2009; Brakus et al., 2009). Emotion is sometimes used with effect and mood interchangeably (Oliver, 1997). Effect, however, may specifically refer to a wide range of moods, emotions, feelings and drives that occur when an individual assesses the importance, causes and implications of certain events (Maute and Dube, 1999; Oliver, 1997). Mood is the mild and fun state of the mind, (Liljander and Bergenwall, 1999; Sirakaya et al., 2004).

Emotions from another point of view are more intense and mood-specific stimuli evoked by cognitive perceptions of events that are affected by internal (e.g. personality, interests, goals) and external (e.g. product results, other person's responses) situations that are cognitively translated and interpreted as detrimental or beneficial (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Lazarus, 1991; Liljander & Bergenwall, 1999; Mathews & MacLeod, 1994; Oliver, 1997). Consumers are emotional beings in pursuit of sensitive experiences, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), and in many situations, emotions can be a motivation for consumption and can influence the choice between competing goods or services.

Physical Element

The physical environment has been established as another aspect that forms the emergence of an experience. According to Sfandla and Björk, (2013), experiences are relational and, as such, the surrounding variables are not isolated, but rather context-dependent and formed. Bitner (1992) posited that the physical environment, or 'servicescape,' refers to the man-made, firmly controllable environment within which service experience takes place,. Elements such as objects, music, lighting, architecture and signage provide offline servicescapes (Lam, 2001).

It has also been found that the physical environment consists of many elements, such as the natural landscape (Arnould and Price, 1993), the historical environment, the socio-cultural and religious aspects (Jennings et al., 2009) and the performances (Li, 2000; Pritchard and Havitz, 2006), which are the essence of a destination. The physical environment is often defined within a micro-context by physical facilities (Andersson and Mossberg, 2004) and constructed environments, such as the site of operation, accessibility and buildings (Carmichael, 2005). In addition, numerous senses, including auditory, aesthetic, kinesthetic and sensory stimuli (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987), were identified to affect the body of the visitor and the essence of the development of experiences (Jansson, 2002; Trauer and Ryan, 2005; Mossberg, 2007; Matteucci, 2013). Bebeko (2000) contends that one of the key ways of evaluating the tangibility of tourism is to measure the environmental satisfaction of visitors.

Sensory element

According to Rodaway, (1994), human senses provide knowledge about the surrounding world and mediate daily interactions, helping people to make sense of the world. Hultén et al., (2009) stated that each individual becomes conscious of and perceives organizations, products, and brands through the senses. Moreover, places and people's surrounding environments are often regarded as multisensory, consisting not just of visual experiences, but also of sounds, smells, tastes and touches relevant to them (Bitner, 1992; Heide and Gronhaug, 2006; Howes, 2006; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Porteous, 1985; Rodaway, 1994; Urry, 2002).

The picture of the destination is an abstraction of sensory and/or conceptual knowledge (Stringer, 1984), i.e., an understanding of its own reality by the tourist (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). Schifferstein (2010) suggests that the relationship between an entity and the environment is focused on sensory information that is consciously and unconsciously collected, thereby providing a mechanism for evaluating and experiencing things. Thus, the tourist encounters the place with all its five senses during a visit to the destination (Markwell, 2001), literally absorbing the certain environment (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993).

Social Element

The social aspect of customer experience relates to the influence of staff, other customers and broader social networks on a customer's experience with a brand (Verhoef et al., 2009). Interactions with and appearance of service employees, other customers, as well as customer comparison groups can affect his or her experience with a brand (Verhoef et al., 2009). A major part of the process of creating a tourist experience is social interaction. With respect to the client-to-customer relationship, Cedric (2007) believes that social contact is much more examined than tourist-to-resident relationships.

A significant basis for how a tourist measures the service experience is also the nature of the person-to-person contact between an employee and a tourist (known as the service encounter) (Henning-Thurau 2004). Indeed, comprehensive research on service quality has found that the conduct of service workers influences the perception of the service by the customer (Zenithal et al., 1996; Bitner, 1990). Thus, Brown et al. (2002:11) characterize staff conduct as "the tendency or predisposition of an employee to meet the requirements of customers in an on-the-job context." Employee conduct helps to foster common ideals and build relationships between workers in the organization, which in turn contribute positively to the achievement of a company's overall effective experience (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993).

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as the overall cognitive or affective reaction of consumers to product use (Oliver, 1997) and the judgment of consumers as to whether a product/service provides an affordable level of consumption-related satisfaction (Chen, Huang and Petrick, 2016). Similarly, other authors describe satisfaction as an efficient state resulting from a performance decision relative to expectations (Parsons, 2002; Payne & Holt, 2001), or the affective state of the customer resulting from an overall evaluation of the service experience (Verhoef et al., 2002) or "the feeling of pleasure or dissatisfaction of a person from comparing the perceived performance of a product (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations" (Kotler, 2006).

Severt et al. (2007) therefore described tourist satisfaction as the degree of the satisfaction enjoyment of the tourist that resulted from the experience of the trip about a product or service function that meets the needs, expectations and wants of the tourist in connection with the trip. Satisfaction is specifically referred to in the sense of tourism as a result of pre-travel perceptions and post-travel experiences. When encounters go beyond expectations, the visitor is happy. However, if the visitor experiences some sort of disappointment, he or she will be unhappy (Chen & Chen, 2010; Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Relationship between Cognitive element and Tourist Satisfaction

The marketing literature defines goal-oriented conduct as a cognitive process; in which the achievement of goals is the outcome of the process (e.g., Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008). Achieving goals thus

defines one element of customer experience and it is important to focus on the achievement of goals to assess the cognitive component of customer experience (Novak et al., 2003).

Del Bosque and Martin (2008) carried out an analysis of the cognitive and affective psychological process that a person undergoes during the pre-experience and post-experience stages in order to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in tourism consumer psychology. They found that the preconceived perception of the destination affects preferences and consumer loyalty. Based on the above, cognitive element has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, which is the first hypothesis,

H1. Cognitive element plays a significant role in influencing tourist satisfaction.

Relationship between Emotional Element and Tourist Satisfaction

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) believed that consumers are emotional beings in pursuit of sensitive experiences and that in many situations, emotions can be a motivation for consumption and can influence the choice between competing goods or services. Berry et al., (2006) also indicated that consumers judge their service interactions and experiences based on a combination of cognitive and emotional assessment of all the clues

Hager and Dalia (2016) investigated the impact on tourists' customer satisfaction in Tunisia of emotional experience and position attachment. Research findings revealed that during a ride, positive emotions build an emotional attachment and produce satisfaction. Hosany and Gilbert (2009) found that tourists' emotional experiences are related to satisfaction, which in turn has a significant influence on behavioral intentions. Based on the above, emotional element has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction which is the second hypothesis

H2. Emotional element plays a significant role in influencing tourist satisfaction.

Relationship between Physical Element and Tourist Satisfaction

Abubakar and Mavondo, (2014) argued that service environment performs multiple roles such as environment communication, quality communication, standards conveyed and the tangibility of the otherwise intangible is reflected in the service environment. Chen (1981) also described the tourism environment as a kind of environment in which people can participate and have fun in tourism activities, experience beauty, gain spiritual, physical enjoyment and knowledge.

Raza (2013) established that there is significant impact of servicescape on customer satisfaction in Pakistan's restaurant industry. Okonkwo (2015) also found that there is a positive and significant correlation between physical architecture and customer patronage. . Based on the above, physical element has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction which is the second hypothesis

H3. Physical element plays a significant role in influencing tourist satisfaction.

Relationship between Sensory Element and Tourist Satisfaction

Sensory marketing techniques are ways to build and incorporate multi-sensory experiences both at the product level (goods, services, events, locations) and at the contact level (Rodrigues et al., 2011).

Guzel and Dortyol (2016) explored multi-sensory-based memorable tourism experiences and found that tourists' sensations were used to convey their tourism experiences and that the detailed sub-dimensions of each sensation contributed to these memorable experiences. Randhir et al. (2016) also found that the different senses have an impact on consumer buying behavior especially for KFC consumers and that consumers found the senses such as music to be relaxing and smell as stimulating. Based on the above, sensory element has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction which is the second hypothesis

H4. Sensory element plays a significant role in influencing tourist satisfaction

Relationship between Social Element and Tourist Satisfaction

The essence and outcomes of experiences are uniquely formed according to the social context and social processes (co-creation, sharing, friendship, appreciation, bonding, communitas) that occur at the time of the encounter (Arnould & Price, 1993; Wang, 1999; Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Ziółkowska-Weiss (2017) presented the social factors conditioning tourist activity and destinations among Chicago Polonia with the aim is to check whether affiliation to an organization influences a greater frequency of tourist trips of Chicago Polonia and whether it has an impact on the choice of tourist destination.. They found that membership of and affiliation to an organization influences choice of destination. Findings from Kinnunen, Honkanen and Luonila (2021) research also showed that festival attendance, both festival career development and festival fandom are most clearly present in motivation development and social dimensions.

Based on the above, social element has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction which is the second hypothesis

H5. Social element plays a significant role in influencing tourist satisfaction.

II. Material and Methods

Research Design The descriptive survey was chosen considering the purpose of the study, the research questions and the magnitude of the target population

Area of Study The area of study is the six states in the South West geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The six states are Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ondo and Ekiti.

Population and sampling size of the Study The number and character of the tourists are clearly unknown. This makes the researchers to non-probability sampling which is purposive sampling technique. The population comprises 100 tourists purposefully selected from each of the six states of the geopolitical states making 600 tourists.

Data collection, To fully investigate the effect of customer experience on tourist satisfaction, a structured questionnaire consisting of respondents profile and 63 measurement items was created to collect the data from respondents. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The questionnaire items on the variables were chosen from previous studies; (cognition, Weiler and Yu, 2008; Emotion, Richins, 1998; Physical, Vong and Ung, 2011; Sensory, Yang and He, 2011; Social, Yang and He, 2011; and Tourist satisfaction, Bajaj, 2015). The field work took place between 15th November, 2019 and 4th February, 2020. The targeted respondents were tourists who visited the six selected tourism destinations from the six states. The destinations were Ikogosi warm spring in Ekiti State, Olumirin Waterfall, Erinmo in Osun State, Old National Park, Oyo State, Idanre Hill in Ondo State, Olumo Rock in Ogun State, and Point of No Return in Badagry, Lagos State. This collection of six destinations was based on the popularity of the destinations:

Data Analysis Method The study made use of both descriptive and inferential statistics in data analysis. Statistical tools used include multiple regression analysis and t-test for analyzing the data from the respondents

Study Duration The data was gathered between 15th November, 2019 and 4th February, 2020.

III. Results

Sample Structure Out of the 600 questionnaires submitted, 519 were returned, showing a response rate of 86.5 %. Out of the 519 returned, 477 responses were found usable representing 79.5%. As for demography, 58.9% were males while 41.1% were females; the 36-45 age bracket were the largest, at 35.6% followed by 26-35 bracket at 27.95, followed by 45 and above age bracket, at 24.9% and under 25 bracket at 11.5%. With regard to educational background, 31.1% had university education, followed by national Diploma holders, 24.5%, followed by post graduate degree holders at 19.5%, high school education at 16.15 and professionals at 8.8%. Majority of the respondents are Nigerians at 91% while the remaining 9% are non-Nigerians. 96% of the respondents went there with companions while the remaining 4% went there alone

Reliability and Viability Analysis of the Formal Survey Using their responses, the instrument was subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha. Nunnally (1978) believes that the Alpha Coefficient of Cronbach with broad values (greater than 0.70) demonstrates higher internal accuracy and thus greater reliability in the measured dimension. The overall reliability of the test instrument is between 0.925 and 0.970, considered to be sufficiently high above the cutoff point. In table 3.4, the breakdown for each construct is shown.

Table 1: Results from Cronbach Alpha

S/No	Variables	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
1	Cognitive	8	0.936
2	Emotional	9	0.962
3	Physical	9	0.949
4	Sensory	8	0.945
5	Social	11	0.952
7	Tourist satisfaction	5	0.925

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2019 and SPSS Output Result

Factor Analysis The research employed factor analysis to test the convergent validity of the questionnaire. The established criteria by Kaizer (1974) are eigenvalue of extracted factors > 1, the factor loading of each construct variable > 0.5, the KMO > 0.6 and cumulative explained variation > 0.5. The result for each construct in research was greater than these values, indicating an acceptable level of convergent validity.

Table 2; Reliability and validity analysis for customer experience constructs

Constructs	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Cumulative explained variance%	KMO
Cognition	.793	4.182	83.643	.845
Emotion	.961			
Physical	.949			
Sensory	.903			

Social	.956		
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Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2029 and SPSS Output Result

Table 3; Reliability and validity analysis for tourist satisfaction statements

Statements	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Cumulative explained variance%	KMO
I am satisfied with my decision to visit the place	.931	3.863	77.261	.827
My choice of the place of visit was a wise one	.900			
I feel that my experience with my visit to the place has been enjoyable	.572			
I think I did the right thing by visiting the place	.919			
I will recommend visiting the place to others	.540			

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2029 and SPSS Output Result

Regression analysis Results. To ascertain the effect of customer experience on tourist satisfaction, the weighted mean of the five independent variables were regressed against the dependent variable. As shown in the table, the regression line has a positive intercept as presented by the constant (c) – 10.949. This means that if all the variables are held constant or fixed, the satisfaction of tourists will increase by 10.95 %. Applying the coefficient of determination and the F-test, the model accounts for 0.963 or 96% of the variations in the factors influencing tourist satisfaction. This implies that 96% of the variations in the factors affecting tourist satisfaction are being accounted for or explained by variations in cognitive, emotional, physical, sensory and social constructs while other independent variables not captured in the model explain just 4% of the variations in tourist satisfaction. Based on the table, it was observed that physical construct has the highest contribution to tourist satisfaction.

According to the table, the P-value of the five independent variables is less than 0.05 and as such, is significant at 5% level.. Therefore, we reject the null hypotheses and conclude that customer experience have significant effect on tourist satisfaction

Table 4; Results from regression analysis
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.574	.052		10.949	.000
	cognition	-.137	.016	-.111	-8.759	.000
	emotion	.346	.041	.363	8.486	.000
	physical	.439	.023	.471	19.420	.000
	sensory	.077	.016	.083	4.915	.000
	social	.162	.035	.175	4.610	.000

a. Dependent Variable: experience

R .982

R² .963

Adj R² .963

F-statistic 2479.645 Sig.000

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2029 and SPSS Output Result

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

We surveyed tourists who had visited the six selected destinations in order to study the relationship among cognitive, emotional, physical, sensory and social elements of customer experience as well as their relationship with tourist satisfaction. The result of this research shows that; 1) cognitive element has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction; 2) emotional element has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction; 3) physical element has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction; 4) sensory element has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction; 6)

social element has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction.

Nowadays, the imageries of escaping everyday life routine and discovering the unknown and unfamiliar means that tourists have extremely greater expectations. For destination managers, they should improve the quality of their services by delivering memorable customer experience. Especially on their physical and social factors, because this research shows that most of the tourists who visited the selected destinations anchored their satisfaction on clean environment, development of new friendship and personal safety and security. Therefore, destination managers should develop strategies to address these expectations of tourists. The

study has limitations that provide reasonable grounds to conduct further studies. For example, the sample of this research only limit to South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, thus, further research may be extended to other geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The research was also focused on customer experience from the consumer perspective. However, managing and designing customer experience could also be investigated from the corporate perspective.

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