The effect of pandemic on homebased tourism: post Covid-19

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Abstract
The present study explores the effect of a pandemic on home-based tourism and tourists' decision to appreciate and patronize local indigenous sites, theater, and other tourism activities. An increase in the global spread of COVID-19 pandemic and incessant rise in deaths, especially in renowned destinations, travel restrictions and subsequent closure of international tourist sites; have pulled Nigerian tourists' motivation away from international destinations. A survey of 250 frequent Nigerian travelers reported their cultural experiences before and during the pandemic and their decision to patronize Home-based tourist-oriented activities. The respondents' primary reasons for the push from international destinations were fear of COVID-19 infection, fear of death, and stigmatization. Significant reasons for pull were the low rate of spread, low deaths, and local traditional remedies availability. While the former was significant push factors identified, the latter were perceived as pull factors. However, respondents never considered facilities, weather, and airfares. Thus, this research significantly models local indigenous tourist sites' projection and cultural activities as tools for revitalizing home-based tourism in the post-COVID–19 era. It calls on government, tourism industry, and private firms to turn attention towards the revitalization of local indigenous tourist sites and cultural activities to attract tourists to enhance sustainable home-based tourism development.

Keywords: Homebased tourism; Covid-19; fast food joints.

1 Introduction
“Tourism is considered one of the hardest hits by the COVID-19 outbreak. The sector is experiencing a rapid and sharp drop in demand and a surge in job losses globally, putting many SMEs at risk. Despite tourism's proven resilience in responses to other crisis, the depth and breadth of the current pandemic will likely have a longer-lasting effect on international tourism compared to other industries (Maniga, 2020”). The pandemic has drastically influenced all sectors of the global economy. The imposition of travel restrictions, entry bans and other quarantine measures (Salcedo et al., 2020) has caused a push away from international tourism destinations. This push has greatly affected international tourism patronage. Many destinations have been abandoned, and there seems to be no hope that things may soon go back to normal.

“I have never seen it like this. Usually, we don’t have time to stand for even a minute,” said a waitress who goes by the name Pookie.

“Lots of businesses have shut here, and if we don’t see foreign tourists coming back soon, we may also shut. Some locals are coming on the weekends, but that’s not enough to keep us all going,” she said, pointing to the empty tables. Above are some excerpts from a post on the Thompson Reuters Foundation News by Rina Chandran on the impact of the pandemic on international tourists’ patronage in Thailand

Tourism is embedded in culture; tourism products make up tourists' cultural experiences (Yta & Umukoro, 2018; Iyorza, 2017). Tourism is a way of life for different people across the globe (Ogar & Edor, 2020). People travel for various reasons. The greatest reason for travel can be summed up in one word, “Escape,” escape from the dull, daily routine; escape from the familiar, the commonplace, the ordinary; escape from the job, the boss, the customer, the commuting, the house the lawn, the leaky faucets (UKessay, 2018)

Tourists experience some form of emotional and psychological pleasure whenever they visit tourism sites or attend cultural activities. Tourists connect with the culture and people of the destination (Umukoro, 2018). For instance, a respondent narrates the fulfillment she derives while queuing up alongside French locals at bakeries for a baguette. This and many other cultural experiences recorded during this research are perceived as pull factors to various tourism destinations.

The emergence of the pandemic has changed the travel habits and choices of tourists. It has rather boosted home-based tourism. Attendance at local tourist sites and cultural events has increased. Current choices for tourists comprise cultural displays, Social activities, and local sports. These activities have become tourist-oriented activities and are readily patronized by tourists during the pandemic. Locals are seen in large numbers at roadside cultural displays, traditional marriage receptions, impressive performances at fast food joints, and local football competitions. These locations have become more creative to attract more tourists. For instance, cultural displays at traditional marriages, special performances at fast food joints, and frequent local football tournaments. All geared towards making home-based tourism attractive to tourists.

It is worthy to note here that Nigeria and Cross River State have cultural tourism activities that attract tourists from everywhere. Before the pandemic, Carnival had become for different States in Nigeria, one distinctive tourist-oriented cultural activity. This cultural activity attracts both home-based and international tourists from neighboring countries. Cities like Calabar, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja have different types of tourism activities ranging from theatre,
highlife, gospel, movies, traditional sports, food contests, bikers and cultural carnival, national and international pageantry (Yta, 2020). These events come up towards the end of the year. Because of the lack of varieties of attractive tourism activities before and after the various carnival seasons and dilapidated facilities (Umukoro & Odey, 2020), the drive to patronize international destinations has been rising. Tourists engage in various kinds of tourism activities such as Nature, Pilgrim, and Medical tourism. Rome, India, France, and the USA topped the list of most visited tourists’ destinations in this research. The research has three objectives, as follows:

- To highlight the impact of the pandemic on international tourism.
- To explore and encourage home-based tourism in the state
- To encourage collaboration between tourism stakeholders for tourism development.
- Finally, the research shows a shift from international tourism patronage to home-based tourism patronage due to the pandemic. This could be an opportunity to develop the tourism sector in the state and the country at large.

2 Method

The survey sample comprised 250 local tourists interviewed at selected Fast-Food Joints (FFJ) in Calabar. Through participation and semi-structured interviews, information was collected about state of origin, marital status, employment status, travel frequency, and cultural experiences within and outside Nigeria. Open questions about general reasons for push away from international destinations and pull to home-based tourism were asked. Offering a list of answers with yes/no options, it then inquired about the reason for the low patronage of local destinations and tourism activities in the past. The list is applied to all types of tourism activities. Finally, respondents were asked about their personal reasons for their choices and about which push or pull factors were considered most relevant.

The research employed the sociocultural evolution theory (Lenski & Lenski, 1970) and the push-pull theory of motivation. These theories were of value to the research as they both helped to understand and interpret the various reasons for a change in choice of destination. The push-pull theory further explains the reason for the movement of people to a particular destination. In the case of this study, the pandemic is seen as a push factor for Nigerians away from international tourism and leisure activities.

Respondents confirm that before the pandemic, Europe and Asia attracted more tourists due to their unique cultural and social tourism activities; these countries according to a review on travel and tourism on Statistica journal, are predicted to face more substantial blows because of the pandemic than others due to their high reliance on tourism. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that “the international tourist arrivals will be down by 20% to 30% in 2020, when compared with 2019 figures, equivalent to a loss of 300 to 450 US$ billion in international tourism receipts (exports) – almost one-third of the US$ 1.5 trillion generated globally”. Currently, due to the pandemic, individuals no longer desire cultural experiences in international destinations. The study is based on the three most practiced tourism activities presented by respondents: nature tourism, Pilgrimage tourism, and Medical tourism. Though some respondents practiced other types of tourism, these were the most relevant.

2.1 Nature Tourism

The attraction for this kind of tourism is determined by the climate and topography of a destination (Merab, 2015). The study is based on 3 most visited adventurous sites by respondents.

Tourists describe San Ignacio as one of the most visited eco-tourism destinations in the world. It is in Belize and has an underground world made up of stalactites that look like melting candles as well as honeycomb fossils formation. This according to tourists, is one of the wonders of the site. Another is Leh in India. This site is famous for its skiing activities, hiking, boat racing, cycling, and mountain climbing. It is a beautiful and very relaxing destination for retirees. The Waitomo caves in New Zealand was another pull for most adventure-loving tourists. These caves are lit by thousands of glowworms that are seen clinging to the walls of the ceiling. There are also hiking and mountaineering activities for tourists.

Below are some of the excerpts from respondents.

“I have visited this place repeatedly. I just love the connectivity with nature. Usually I travel with my family, we spend a week or two” (James)

“I had booked my trip for April, then the lockdown. Still can’t believe I will miss India this year” (Sarah)

“Life is about connecting with nature, and in Waitomo, I forget all my worries.” (Etekamba)

2.2 Pilgrimage Tourism

Spirituality is an important aspect of both local and international daily lives (Iyorza & Abu, 2020). People in their own different ways and attitudes express powerful importance to certain aspects of spirituality. Tourists are attracted to destinations that possess unique spiritual significance. Because of this general pious culture, religious tourism is seen as one of the most attractive tourism. During the research, 3 destinations were predominant. They are Jerusalem, India, and Vatican City.

Jerusalem is a city for all religions, said one of the respondents. One most significant site is the Wailing Wall, which is considered a place where the presence of God dwells. Pilgrims go to the walls for elevation, restoration, and sanctification. India is another spiritually significant destination for pilgrims. Amongst other spiritual sites in the city, the Ganges River was the most visited by tourists. Tourist visits the river for spiritual purification. Tourists affirmed the city to be a multi-tourist attraction destination. Vatican City is another most visited tourist site. The city is a holy place for the
Catholic faithful. However, the wonderful and historical tourist sites in Vatican City are a pull factor for the destination. Respondents had these to say:

“When you rest on the Wailing Wall, you see the Almighty God. It is so real I don’t believe I won’t be visiting Jerusalem this year” (Steve)

“The spirituality in India is superb” (Alice)

“I won’t see the Pope this year! It is unbelievable. I don’t remember not seeing a Pope in a year” (Harriet)

2.3 Medical Tourism

Many factors pull tourists to certain destinations for healthcare. Affordable airfares, customer-friendly facilities, presence of trained and experienced medical practitioners are some of the pull factors listed by respondents. India topped the list in this research for healthcare tourism. The pull factors included an abundance of trained medical practitioners, 24 hours accessible online customer care services, and a standard overall cost-effective package with modern medical facilities. Malaysia was second on the list. Tourist preferred this destination because it had excellent medical facilities, affordable airfares, and accommodation.

Panama was another destination that tourists recommended. According to respondents, Panama was a favorite destination for plastic surgeries and cancers at a very affordable cost.

“I have 6 months routine for my medics. India was is the best I can think of” (Lawrence)

“For me, tourism to Malaysia is using a stone to kill several birds. Since 2015, I have not missed a trip. For my research and medicals, Malaysia is the best.” (Jude)

“My mother’s Cancer was cured in Panama. We spend all our holidays there. It is cheaper and mama can carry out her routine checkups.” (Edward)

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Description of Tourist Cultural Experience during the Pandemic Performances at Fast Food Joints (FFJ)

Before the pandemic, it was uncommon to see theatrical performances and other side attractions at quick-service restaurants (QSR), popularly called “Fast Food Joints” (FFJ) in Nigeria. This was because the restaurants had minimal table services. Customers order and take-away their food. However, during the lockdown period, businesses had to be innovative to create memorable events for their customers.

These events were created using the push-pull theoretical framework. Many scholars (Dann, 1977; 1981; Crompton, 1979; Zhang & Lam, 1999; Jang & Cai, 2002; Hsu & Lam, 2003) have used this theory. Gnoth (1997) describes push factors as internal motives or forces that cause tourists to seek activities to reduce their needs. He further describes pulling factors as destination generated forces and the knowledge that tourists hold about a destination.

Firstly, to attract customers, 90% of the FFJ went online to advertise their meals of the day. Patronage gradually increased and as states began to ease off lockdown, people began to seize the opportunity to free themselves from the boredom of the long lockdown. Frequent travelers who could no longer make long trips to favorite international destinations developed the habit of sit-outs at popular FFJs. As more people sat out eating, drinking, and socializing for longer periods at these FFJs the need to entertain them arose. Demand for special performances began to increase.

3.1.1 Mini carnival display at the choice fast food

De Choice Fast Food was one of the liveliest FFJ during the pandemic in Calabar. Before the lockdown, the restaurant had always treated its customers to some live band performances. This usually lasted from about 7 pm to 8:30 pm. According to a waiter, it was meant to keep the place lively. People rarely stopped by. Few customers stayed back for some seconds after making their purchase. While others, ate either in or take-away. The restaurant has a large sit out space to accommodate customers and observe the required physical distancing. As the number desiring to sit back for hours eating, drinking, and chatting away increased, the need for varieties of theater performances. The restaurant chose different days of the week to display different activities. Fridays were favorite for most of the respondents because of the mini carnival display.

The carnival was a dance drama. The costumes were colorful and beautiful. The storyline depicted the realities of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The first scene presented dancers in costumes of different people and cultures depicting international tourism. In between, they were others dressed in costumes depicting the coronavirus. Those infected by the virus were dropping dead, while others were seen running for safety. The second scene showed people costumed in African attire, moving freely, and enjoying themselves, encouraging others to join them that it was safer here. There was a display of various African traditional dances to end the performance. The presentation lasted for 60 minutes. It was a memorable experience and spectators asked for more.

Some had these to say:

“This is interesting; the COVID-19 costume looks so real”

“I feel so relaxed”

“We need to have more of this in other places”

“I’m impressed, De Choice you guys are great”

“Never knew something like this could be done here”
3.1.2 Private Organized Tours (POT)
POT was a special package put together by some university students to cater to local tourists’ cultural experiences from other states. These groups of tourists were families who came in from other states to ease off the effect of the long lockdown. They are comprised of youths and children in the company of their parents. The package was a “city tour package,” all COVID-19 measures in place. During the day, Family members were driven around the city of Calabar and its environs. Though the tourists confirmed that most of the sites were abandoned and dilapidated, it was worth seeing. Places visited were, Tinapa, Qua falls, Mary Slessors grave, the Monolithes and Cercopan. This activity was very refreshing and had a positive impact on local tourism said most of the respondents. More comments by tourists

“This reminds me of some visits abroad”
“This experience is therapeutic”
“It is therapeutic. I am glad I can achieve so much with little”
“This is my first visit to the city of Calabar. The tourism bureau is wasting resources. They have so much to do”
“My children are so relieved. We needed this vacation since we can’t travel abroad”

3.2 Cultural Displays
This was a mixture of various traditional African dances. It usually lasted 60 minutes. Respondents loved creativity. They said the fertility dance was sensual, passionate, and captivating. They loved the simplicity of the costumes and how the dancers switched from one theme to another. The war dance was partly Zulu and partly Benue. They also had the Voodoo dance, something most of the spectators had never experienced before. “This is spiritual, divine, touchy said a respondent. The Voodoo dance was a sacred dance usually seen in the Republic of Benin. This segment of dances attracted a lot of passers-by and in the words of one of the waiters, we have more customers because of these dances. People sit for a long time eating and drinking just to wait for this performance.

3.3 Feedback from Respondents
Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to participants. Twenty-five each day for 10 days. They were given ten minutes to fill and return. More than half of the respondents were visitors (70.2% visitors, 21.8% home-based). The number of children was fewer at night. Males were more during the night events (58.2% males, 41.8% females). Respondents were of all ages, employed, business, unemployed, students and politicians. In structuring the questionnaires, the objectives of the study were kept in view. Real tourism cultural experiences have been organized. What was the perception of the respondents on this? Responses from the questionnaires were organized using a codebook by trained coders. Results showed that more than 85% of the respondents were satisfied with the local tourism experiences. Below are some of the excerpts from the discussions

“Tourism is tourism anywhere. We have had fun without spending so much on airfares and hotels” (Julius and family)
“My family and I travelled from Uyo without fear of COVID-19. We have had fun for 8 days” (The Abdusks)
“Calabar is a few hours from PH, yes the roads are bad but the experience is worth the time” (Judith and family)
“The tour was awesome. This is our first visit to Calabar. Maybe other nearby states should copy so we can tour around Nigeria” (Eboh)
“Oh, I enjoyed the drive around the city” (Caleb)
“Foreigners will love this experience” (Mama)
“I enjoyed the mini carnival. The drama was overwhelming” (Eloho)
“It was great. We feel fulfilled. I earned some money during the pandemic” (dancer)
“More eateries should have such special performances to liven up the city” (Etim)
“We need more of this in Calabar” (Joseph)

3.4 Future Travel Intentions
Why do people travel to a destination? Motivation to travel and the choice of where to go are two different things. More than 50% may not travel abroad in the next two years for fear of the infection. Respondents had these to say concerning the pandemic.

“They have no drugs and no vaccines yet”
“We have local remedies here in Nigeria; we take herbs and other traditional mixtures”
“Tourism here is cheaper and we are safer here than there”
“The death rate and infection rate in Nigeria is lower compared to the western world”
“I don’t want to die; I don’t want to expose my children”
“We will wait until we are sure that the pandemic is over.”

4 KEY FINDINGS
The following summarizes the findings from respondents
• There is satisfaction in the cultural experiences of local tourists during the pandemic
• Businesses are beginning to create attractive tourism activities during the pandemic
• Males seemed to patronize night events suggesting a gender differential in choice
• Local tourists can patronize indigenous destinations if there is innovation
Tourists who travelled frequently to Europe and Asia are satisfied with cultural experiences at home during the pandemic.

Calabar is safe for tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Most popular tourist sites in Cross River State are dilapidated.

Tourists travel from city to city to ease off the effect of the pandemic.

There was an increase in local tourism during the pandemic.

It is worthy to note here that Fast Food Joints in Calabar have reinvented tourism activities during the pandemic to enhance local tourists' cultural experiences. Local tourists no longer desire to travel abroad for fear of COVID-19 infection. There is a need for Government, private sector, and individuals to use the pandemic period to rebrand, upgrade, and redesign cultural tourism in the state. This will help meet the tourism needs of local tourists during the post-COVID-19 era. There is no gainsaying that tourism in Calabar has not been attractive. With the emergence of the Calabar Christmas Festival and then the popular Carnival Calabar, which draws tourists and carnival lovers from all over the globe, various Government regimes have tried in different ways to redesign the tourism drive.

The pandemic has created for Government and other stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry to recreate events that are capable of attracting local tourists from other states during the post COVID – 19 era. For instance, the Tourism Bureau in collaboration with the Carnival commission and some FFJ may desire to explore the possibility of organizing mini carnivals at strategic points every month. This will ensure a richer and more attractive tourism product during the pandemic. Other events such as sports, boat regatta, cooking competitions could be incorporated into the redesigned tourism product.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the feedback from the respondents, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Fast Food Joints in the state can collaborate with the tourism bureau, come up with a proposal to the State government to make policies that would encourage attractive home-based tourism products in the state.
- Fast Food Joints will need to liaise with the theatre arts department of the University to use professionals in the field of theatre productions.
- Organize training workshops for the home-based dancers and performers to enhance their productivity.
- Work with hospitality companies to come up with cheap, attractive, and affordable tour packages to attract more tourists from other states.
- To revive local tourism, the Government should carry out a thorough rebranding, restructuring, and revitalization of the state's tourism sites.

6 CONCLUSION

Calabar has an abundance of tourism products and tourism sites. Most of the tourism sites have been in existence for decades but were mismanaged, underutilized, and abandoned. The COVID – 19 pandemics has created an avenue for Government and the private sector to reassess the economic value of tourism and local tourism and commence total rebranding to meet local tourists' needs during the post COVID–19 eras.

REFERENCES


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