E-Marketing and Tourism Development in Obudu Mountain Resort, Cross River State, Nigeria: An Impact Analysis

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Abstract: Tourism in recent times has been expressed as a leisure and event-based activity that involves people from distant areas. Consequently, information and communication, particularly in this internet and World Wide Web era has been the primary tool for managing the industry. This study examines this practice known as e-Marketing and its impact in the development of the Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State, Nigeria. It adopts the survey research method and the questionnaire to generate data and descriptive statistics with the SPSS Version 20.0 for analysis. The results of the analysis revealed a significant use of the internet and social network sites for advertisement and product sales; a positive correlation between e-Marketing and the growth of patronage and annual revenue of the Mountain Resort's and that poor network connection and increasing rate of internet fraud undermines the Resort's e-Marketing activities.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, many people have developed the practice of travelling to different places during holidays and work leaves for business, meetings, workshops/conferences, sports and leisure, among others. In this travel known as tourism, people stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than a year[1]. The areas of attraction include beaches, wildlife, tropical forests, museums, spectacular waterfalls, traditional dances and festivals, local craft centres and designed leather works, i.e., hide and skin, etc. In the travels, money is spent on transportation, accommodation, security, provision of conveniences, and good things. Consequently, effective management of these activities through creating centres of tourist attraction, attracting potential tourists, provision of services that meet the needs and demands of the tourists has continued to develop as one of the major business activities in the contemporary times.

Tourism is a significant socio-economic and development opportunity for most countries and the livelihoods of residents in its locations[2, 3]. It creates and provides employment opportunities for residents, Foreign exchange and revenue generation, protection of the natural environment and delivery of quality visitor experience[4, 5]. It prompts governments, communities, groups and individuals to engage in tourism businesses such as aviation, accommodation, i.e., hotels, restaurants, cafes, equipment, rental companies, tourist's guides, boutique, souvenir shops, transportation, entertainment, etc. People are employed to provide services like housekeeping, souvenir shops, boutiques, local troupe,

baby-sitting, valet service, laundry service, amusements and car hire and taxi services among others and these attract fees/payments. Therefore, tourism creates employment opportunities and revenue increase to government, groups and individuals. Example, the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) generated eighty-six billion naira revenue in 2012 from 4.7 million tourists that visited the country.

In Cross River State in Nigeria, tourism has attracted unprecedented revenue generation and other benefits with its 10% continual annual increase in the number of visitors, since, 2000. The state has many tourist attraction sites such as the Obudu Mountain Resort, Afi Forest Reserve that is home to monkeys, Ikom Monoliths that is home to stone circles, Agbokim Water Falls, Cross River National Park, Cercopan, Tinapa Resort, Freedom Bay, National Museum and Monuments, etc. Equally, the state holds International Mountain Race, Ugep New Yam Festival (Leboku) and Obudu New Yam Festival among others. These have attracted an unmitigated influx of hundreds of thousands of tourists to the state and consequent revenues to all that are engaged in the tourists business.

The effectiveness of these tourist sites and sustenance of the accruing revenues depend on their ability to provide or satisfy the information need of the tourist and provide effective service delivery. The information need ranges from giving details about the geographical locations and environments of the tourist sites, specific details of requirements for visiting the sites, and available services and their values, methods or channels of payment, procedures and rules governing activities in the sites. This is achieved in most cases, through tourism brochures, pictures, tourism maps, video cassettes, guide books, compact discs, slides, CD-ROM, films, digitization of photographs and creation of web sites and blog for such tourist sites.

Considering the spatial locations or countries/states of residents of potential tourists, each of the tourist sites tend to host the information needs of potential tourist in their various web sites. Besides, audio, visual and audio-visual information is also provided through cable networks, television and radio services as advertorials to inform, attract and guide potential visitors and to enrich the experience of attractions, performances and events in their centres. In these, each tourist site faces the challenge of trying to create and gain identity with untold millions of potential tourists covering the whole social strata, professions and orientations, interests and needs. They are faced with matching the expectations of diverse travellers to the bewildering array of choices and options provided by other competitors in the tourism industry and to differentiate themselves from others.

On their part, potential tourists can acquire information from a wide variety of sources directly or indirectly from the tourism supplier. Indirectly, most engage the services of an intermediary such as travel agents to serve as advisors, search for suitable products, and also using their knowledge and to help match their needs with travel experiences. Directly, many others contact different tourist attraction sites for comparism and choice. Whichever option a potential tourist may choose, the fact remains that the World Wide Web and Internet remain the instrument or channels of communication. The primary role of this instrument is to facilitate correct information transfer, the sales and purchasing processes[7]. Thus, potential tourists use smart Phones and Laptop applications using mobile network to know in advance what they expect to see, the services to receive, expenses to make on arriving and therefrom even make advance payments or bookings before arrival[8]. These on-line practices which are generally known as e-Marketing, add value, comfort and safety to tourists and tend to develop tourist centres.

This study, therefore, examines the practice of this e-Marketing system in the Obudu Mountain Resort with the aim of assessing its impact on the development of the tourist site and identifying the major problems confronting e-Marketing in the site. Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State is a leading tourist site in the state from where most visitors visit other attraction sites.

Objectives of the study: The main objective of the study is to assess the impact of e-Marketing on the development of Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State. However, the specific objectives are:

- To find out if Obudu Mountain Resort operates a systematized and well-equipped e-Marketing service
- To assess the impact of e-Marketing services on the level of tourism products patronage in Obudu Mountain Resort
- To ascertain the major challenges facing e-Marketing in Obudu Mountain Resort

Significance of the study: This study is significant to the point that it will help the Tourism Development Commission, the Tourism Bureau and tourist industries to effectively adopt and strategize on the use of the internet to increase market reach, enhance communication with existing and potential customers, provide accessible information and develop tourism brand image.

Review of extant literature: The concept of tourism is seen by the World Tourism Organization[9] as the movement of people to countries or places outside their

usual environment for personal, business or professional purposes. It is movement in search of recreation, leisure to perform religious activities, business purposes and this lasts for a limited period. Such movement can be national and international but involves a temporary relocation from one's place of abode. Essentially, this movement known as tourism has the capacity to generate large scale employment, infrastructural development, revenue generation and general development in the host environment[6, 10]. As a means of social interaction and cultural diversities, it contributes to national integration in an ethnically divided country with different cultures and languages[3, 11] and contributes to the growth of global economy and major cities across the globe[12].

Tourism involves a barrage of diverse leisure-related activities such as sports, recreation, food vendoring, holidaying, transportation and sightseeing. It has a potential multiplier and spill-over effects on the rest of the economy[13, 14]. It generates foreign exchange, increases balance of payment, increases national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), attracts development capital, increases the rate of technology transfer and propagates western values system[14, 15].

As a result, states, communities, and groups that host attraction sites engage different forms of advertorials to lure potential tourists to their environs. Thus, most tourists choose their destinations based on the marketing efforts of owners of the sites. They promote their sitesand activities through advertisementor other forms of marketing to create some sort of awareness and appeal to the emotions of potential tourists for patronage[16, 17]. In most cases, these travellers are attracted by climatic, weather condition and scenery of the environment, the socio-cultural attributes and events of the destination areas[10]. To achieve this, strategies like public-private partnership with experts inhospitality business, direct marketing, mass media adverts in print and electronic communication and staff training on tour guiding and computer literacy can be adopted[17]. Specifically, the emergence of the World Wide Web and the Internet has led to wider coverage in this tourism marketing in the 21st century.

According to Buhalis and Jun[18] and Nyheim *et al*.[19], the Internet is a multimedia network that links different networks and their users globally with ease and efficient communication system. Of course, the World Wide Web is part of the internet links. Through the Internet tools information concerning different tourist attractions across the world is made available to all interested and potential tourists while they use the same channel to tour tourist destinations, communicate and arrange for customized adventures or visits[20]. This exchange of information and

consequent arrangement for visit through Internet connections and transactions often called online marketing or e-Marketing can be defined as any form of marketing activity that is conducted online through the use of internet technologies/tools.

E-marketing in the tourism industry comprises not only advertising tourist products in different websites but also other kinds of online activities like emails and social networking, bookings, and payments etc.[21, 22]. The e-Marketing services is designed to inform potential visitors from all divides, culture, ideology, continents and country about available tourism products and their most attractive and innovative attributes. It is home to many combinations of tourism marketing strategies, tools and technology and subsequent travel businesses associated with potential client's efforts to find and pay for them.

E-marketing creates awareness for tourism products, increase their market base, gain traffic from niche conversations held through social networking websites, online discussions, groups and blog comments and consequently enhance tourism brands. E-marketing allows local businesses access to global markets; provides new opportunities to export a wider range of goods and services and improves the internal efficiency within the firms[23, 24]. Additionally, it is a relatively inexpensive platform for marketing campaigns as it is accessible to anyone with internet access[21]. It generates potential clients and a level of service that listens tocustomer's demands and enhances organizational goals[20]. In addition, to hosting websites, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, websites; blog-posts and so on are equally used as platform for the transactions.

Empirical findings reveal that the Internet has been useful channel for travel planning such as travel information search and booking and online purchases such as books, clothes, gifts etc.[25, 26]. For these roles, different forms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been profusely integrated into the tourism industry[27, 28]. Subsequently, online travel bookings and associated travel services are recognized as one of the most successful e-Marketing implementations even in advanced industrial societies[29].

Wei *et al*.[30] revealed a lot of reasons for the adoption of e-marketing by contemporary managers and owners of tourism. These include the size and scope of activities of the organization, a substantial investment of resources, the inclination to accept change within the organization, the size of its market, the level of competition and the age of the hotel[31]. However, the literature revealed many factors that tend to hinder the effective operation of e-Marketing in the tourism industry. These include the geographical

location of the tourist site and internet connectivity[32], poor infrastructural provisions, lack of effective use available infrastructures[33], high costs of maintenance of the ICTs[34], lack of ICTs skills and poor management tools[35, 36].

In spite of the above limitations, academic literature is replete with evidences that e-Marking enhances or have positive relationship with the development of tourism sites in many countries[37]. The object of consideration that necessitated this research is that virtually all the above studies onICTs and tourism, and the impact of e-Marketing on the development of tourism and its limiting factors were conducted in advanced industrial societies of the West and the East. None relates to Africa and Nigeria particularly Cross Rivers state. Secondly, most of the available researchesin ICT integration into tourism focused extensively on their administrative and operational uses and were conducted over a decade ago. The present effort is an attempt to fill these gaps.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey method and structured questionnaire were adopted as tools of data gathering. The structured questionnaire used provides opportunities for respondents to indicate from among lists of statements or questions the one that truly reflect their position in relation to the phenomenon in question by ticking one of the options provided. The options are: Yes, No and Neutral.The validity of the questionnaire instrument was tested using content analysis while its reliability was tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) which gave a reliability co-efficient of 0.81. The results of both tests were good for the study. Further, the study adopted tables and simple percentage mechanism to determine the level of variance - if any as methods for analyzingthe data generated from the survey. Decisions were taken on the premise of simple majority.

The Obudu Mountain Resort located in Obaliku Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It lays between latitude 6°2113011 and 6°2213011N and longitude 9°221011 and 9°2214511E with an approximate are a of 104 m^2 and a height of about 1576 m above sea level. It is bounded in the North by Benue state, North-East by the Republic of Cameroon to the South-East by Boki Local Government Area in cross river State of Nigeria. The general and marketing managers, staff of ICTs, customer care and booking unitss and Receptionistsform the population of the study. Further, considering the total number of these units which is 55 and statistically manageable, this study adopts it as sample. The managers were selected because they have the broad knowledge of their organizational activitiesand response to their ICTs integration. They are usually responsible for strategic development which include the alignment of ICTs with corporate business strategies. Other components of the population were selected because they are directly involved in marketing the organization's products.

Out of the 55 questionnaires distributed to the respondents, 52 were correctly filled and retrieved while 3 were void. The analysis of the 52 questionnaire received reveals: Manager = 5, ICTs unit = 4, marketing, booking, customer cares and receptionist staff = 43.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's demographic information: A synthesis of the demographic information of the respondents reveals that 36 are male representing 69.2% while 16 are females representing 30.8%; 8 respondents fall within the age bracket of 18-27 years, i.e., 15.4%,16 respondents fall within 28-37 years, i.e., 30.8%, 20 respondents fall within 38-47 years, i.e. 38.5% while 8 respondents fall within the age of 48 and above, i.e., 15.4%. It equally reveals that11 respondents representing 21.4% have acquired West Africa School Certificate (WASC) and National Diploma (ND), 30 respondents i.e. 57.4% have acquired Bachelor Degrees/Higher National Diploma (57.2%) while 11 respondents, i.e., 21.4% obtained different higher degrees such as Masters and Doctorate degrees. It is imperative therefore that majority of the respondents in this study are both literate and matured in mind to respond to the research questions objectively and reasonably too. Nevertheless, the dominance of male respondents has no negative implication for the present study.

The nature of Obudu mountain resort e-Marketing services: An exploration of the various ICT facilities and e-Marketing activities in Obudu Mountain Resort as presented in Table 1 reveals that 78.6% of the respondents agree that the Resort engages in e-mail based booking services for potential customers or tourists. Similarly 94.3% of the respondents agree that Obudu Mountain Resort carries out online advertising its products while 71.3% holds that the Resort operates online payment system which enables tourists to book and pay for accommodation and services before arrival. The Resort equally uses it to make different forms of payments.

To provide the above e-Marketing services, the Resort did not employ the services of private business centre to interact with potential tourists according to 94.3% of the respondents. Rather, the Resort created and uses its own Website, installed and uses CCTV Cameras, intercom and Wireless Internet services for e-Transactions

Table 1: ICT facilities and e-marketing services in Obudu Mountain Resort

Questions/items	Yes		No		Neutral	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
Obudu Mountain Resort engages in e-Mail based booking services for potential customers or tourists	41	78.6	Nil	0	11	21.4
Obudu Mountain Resort operates online real time booking	41	78.6	Nil	0	11	21.4
Obudu Mountain Resort operates online payment system	38	73.1	5	9.6	9	17.3
Obudu Mountain Resort employs the services of private business centre to interact with potential tourists	Nil	0	49	94.2	3	5.8
Obudu Mountain Resort installed and uses intercom in all the rooms to transact business with customers	50	96.2	Nil	0	2	3.8
Obudu Mountain Resort operates tourist's e-checking out system from rooms at the end of their stay	10	19.2	36	69.2	6	11.6
CCTV Cameras were installed in all the rooms	52	100	Nil	0	Nil	0
Obudu Mountain Resort created and has been using Website(s) for advertising the centre and its products	49	94.2	Nil	0	3	5.8
The Mountain Resort provides Wireless internet services to customers constantly for e-transactions	37	71.2	5	9.6	10	19.2
The Resort has been experiencing high level online activities such inquiries from potential tourists, e-Mail communication, booking and payments	47	90.4	Nil	0	5	9.6

Table 2: Impact of e-Marketing on tourism products patronage

Questions/items	Yes		No		Neutral	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
The increasing role of Internet driven ICT services in generating income for the Resort led to the provision, availability and access of internet facilities in the area and its environs	43	82.7	2	3.8	7	13.5
The policy of e-Marketing adopted by the Resort has led to increased provision and availability of infrastructural facilities such as electricity, network service providers and communication facilities, financial institutions, etc.	46	88.4	Nil	0	6	11.6
E-marketing activities adopted by the Resort has led to the introduction of adequate management policies and recruitment of professionals to enhance ICTs development in the area	49	94.2	3	5.8	Nil	0
The Resort has experienced increasing national and international tourists patronages in recent times due to online activities or e-Marketing	42	80.8	5	9.6	5	9.6
E-marketing activities have boasted the establishment and growth of different subsidiary businesses and services in the areas of transportation, banking, advertisement, security agents, etc.	39	75.0	8	15.4	5	9.6
The Resort has continued to experience a steady increase in the level of income generation through e-Marketing in the areas of tourist related activities	45	86.5	7	13.5	Nil	0
Through online communication and transactions, tourists have continued to enjoy quick, effective and efficient and security guaranteed transit to and fro the Resort	39	75.0	10	19.2	3	5.8
E-marketing activities have contributed to the Resort's internal efficiency and to the actualization of the Resort's periodic goals	39	75.0	10	19.3	3	5.8

Field Work in 2019

as attested to by 100, 94.2 and 71.2% of the respondents, respectively. To this effect, 90.4% of the respondents accepted that the Resort has been experiencing high level online activities such inquiries from potential tourists, email communication, booking and payments.

Impact of e-Marketing services on tourism products patronage : An exploration of the contributions or roles of e-Marketing activities in the development or growth of Obudu Mountain Resort as presented in Table 2

above shows that 82.7% of the respondents agreed that e-Marketing has led to increasing levels of income generation and to the provision, availability and access of internet facilities in the area and its environs and increase national and international tourists patronages according to 80.8% of the respondents. The 88.4% of the respondents equally acknowledged that it has also led to increased provision and availability of infrastructural facilities such as electricity, network service providers and communication facilities, financial institutions, etc.

Table 3: Problems of e-marketing in Obudu Mountain Resort

Questions/items	Yes		No		Neutral	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
The age, size and scope of activities in the Obudu Mountain Resort greatly undermine e-Marketing activities and its success	3	5.8	47	90.4	2	3.8
The negative inclination of workers to accept changes within the organization has limited the impact of e-Marketing on the development of the Resort	11	21.2	39	75.0	2	3.8
The geographical location of Obudu Mountain Resort and poor internet connectivity in the environment limit e-Marketing activities	Nil	0	48	92.3	4	7.7
Poor infrastructural provisions, lack of effective use of available infrastructures and high costs of maintenance of available ICTs equipment limit e-Marketing business in the Resort	41	78.8	9	17.3	2	3.8
Absence of professionals, lack of ICTs skills among marketers are major problems hindering e-Marketing in the Resort	38	73.1	9	17.3	5	9.6
Inadequate marketing policy and poor management tools are problems confronting e-Market business in the Resort	Nil	0	48	92.3	4	7.7
Online/Internet scam and fraud have greatly undermined e-Marketing businesses in the Resort	49	94.2	Nil	0	3	5.8

Field Work in 2019

About 94.2% of the respondents equally agreed it has also necessitated the introduction of adequate management policies and recruitment of professionals to enhance ICTs development in the area while 75.0% of the respondents noted that it has enabled tourists to enjoy quick, effective and efficient and security guaranteed transit to and fro the Resort and have contributed to the development of the Resort's internal efficiency and actualization of corporate periodic goals. Innocuously, one can affirm here that e-Marketing businesses embarked upon by Obudu Mountain Resort have made substantial contributions to the development or growth of the Resort and its environs.

The challenges facing e-Marketing in obudu mountain resort: Considering the positive impact of e-Marketing on the development of Obudu Mountain Resort, efforts to establish the major problems limiting the e-Marketing business reveal, according to table 3 above that age, size and scope of activities of the Resort (90.4% of the respondents), negative inclination of workers to accept changes within the organization (75.0% of the respondents), inadequate marketing policy and poor management tools (92.3% of respondents) and geographical location of Obudu Mountain Resort and poor internet connectivity (92.3% of the respondents) do not exhibit any form of hindrance to the activities of e-Marketing in Obudu Mountain Resort.

Nevertheless, the table reveals that poor infrastructural provisions, lack of effective use of available infrastructures and high costs of maintenance of available ICTs equipment (78.8% of the respondents), absence of professionals and lack of ICTs skills among marketers (73.1% of the respondents) and the prevalence of Online/Internet scam and fraud (94.2% of the respondents) are major factors hindering e-Marketing activities and their impact on the development or growth of the Resort.

As a major part of findings made by this study, Obudu Mountain Resort as a 21st century tourist site integrated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), established pro-World Wide Web and Internet driven facilities to enable the Resort establish global reach and easy communication in the contemporary global village. This policy and action of globalizing the activities of the Resort through Web and Internet services synchronizes with those of other establishments across cultures and levels of development as revealed by the works by Buhalis and Jun[18], Solimar International[19] and Nyheim et al.[20]. It is therefore, imperative that Internet is a multimedia network that links different networks and their users globally is potent for e-Marketing.

Further, finding made by the study is that there is a positive relationship between e-Marketing and the development of Obudu Mountain resort. The Resort has continued to experience increased tourist's visits and patronages in recent times a development that has led to increasing income generation, the existence of job opportunities in and around the Resort, growth in transportation business, tour-guiding services, restaurants services, sales of handcraft and other local products among others[6]. This finding collaborates earlier findings by Singh and Kasavana[37] that e-Marketing leads to the growth and development of tourism industry and sites. It therefore, holds that the relationship is devoid of cultural and racial influences. Thus where e-Marketing fails to improve or impact on the development/growth of any tourist attraction, management tools, nature of ICTs and infrastructure that are available and the environment should be interrogated. On this lies the importance of the third aspect of the findings made by this study which relates to factors hindering the e-Marketing businesses of the Resort.

Accordingly, the study found out that poor infrastructural provisions, lack of effective use of

available infrastructures, high costs of maintaining available ICTs equipment, absence of equitable ICTs professionals and lack of ICTs skills among marketers and the prevalence of Online/Internet scam and fraud are major factors hindering e-Marketing activities and their impact on the development or growth of Obudu Mountain Resort. This finding collaborates earlier findings made by Buick[33], Choi and Kimes[34] and Gray *et al.*[36] among others. The implication of this finding for the development of the Resort is that state holders should evolve policy actions to address these problems. Further, the problems associated with ICTs and Internet operations seem to be similar across nations particularly in the Less Developing Countries.

CONCLUSION

The advent of the Internet and its application to tourism has proven successful in the e-Marketing businesses of Obudu Mountain Resort. The Resort has continued to register increasing number of national and international visitors with consequential increases in revenue generation and site's development. These increasing tourism activities have also attracted the provision of many basic amenities like schools, electricity, security, accessible roads, financial and communication facilities. Nevertheless, poor infrastructural provisions, none availability of ICT professionals and poor skills among others have hindered the impact of e-Marketing on the development of the site.

Based on the aforementioned findings and conclusions drawn in this study, it is hereby recommends that requisite and appropriate infrastructure should be provided while ICT strainings, workshops and seminars should be organized for e-Marketing and ICTs staff to equip them with the skills and knowledge on how to maximize their potentials. Further, the costs of maintaining the ICTs facilities and internet operations should be subsidized by providers and government to enable the Resort succeed in its e-Marketing goals. Governments at various levels should equally invest substantially in placing the Resort's advertisements on print, visual, social and electronic media to expose the potentiality and uniqueness of the Resort to the world to promote and enhance the volume of visitor's patronage of the Mountain Resort as that will increase the volume of taxation accruing from it.

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