Tapping Tourism Potentials in Modern-Day Nigeria

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Keywords | Communities of Practice, Experiential Learning, Innovation, Toolkit, Tourism Education

Objectives | This study examines the potentials for cultural tourism in Nigeria and discusses the drivers, obstacles, and avenues for long-term development. Uysal et al. (2020) assert that cultural heritage tourism has a favorable impact on local economies by revealing the elements that support long-term economic viability. Unlocking Nigeria's tourism potential is not merely a prospect but a necessity for sustainable economic growth and cultural preservation. According community involvement is essential to guarantee that the industry benefits the local community, which in turn has a big influence on tourists' expectations and impressions. Incorporating local people into decision-making procedures is crucial for promoting sustainable development and augmenting the genuineness of the tourism encounter. Many nations rely heavily on tourism, and in order to draw tourists, a nation's policies must take into account a number of important aspects, including technology, safety, natural beauty, cultural legacy, and hospitality (Buhalis et al., 2019). The development of the tourism business has the potential to strengthen a nation's economy because it includes all activities that fall under the tourist economy (Galuppo et al., 2020). Travelers' perceptions of a destination have a significant impact on their decision-making process; a favorable perception of a nation improves travelers' desire to visit (Jeong et al. 2019). Digital technology development has been seen as a tool that can help change destination management techniques (Rahimizhian and Ilkan, 2020), and it has been discovered that ICT-based marketing techniques have a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction and encourage their desire to return (Kizgin et al., 2021). Digital marketing and social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram may effectively convey a country's unique features and attractions and connect with modern-day travelers, as demonstrated by Okpoko & Okafor (2021). According to Lee and Park (2023), destination marketing organizations (DMOs) should actively manage user-generated content (UGC) to form a favorable national image. UGC has gained popularity as a technique for promotion. Furthermore, it is essential for spreading sufficient information, creating favorable word-of-mouth, and raising a destination's profile. Nevertheless, despite its rich cultural legacy, varied landscapes, and historical significance in emerging as a major player in the global tourism arena, Nigeria's tourism industry is still not appealing to both domestic and foreign visitors (Yusuff & Ahmed, 2019; Ogunbameru & Jegede, 2021). The report showed that the tourism sector contributed just 3.6% to GDP in 2022. This is because of a number of issues,

including inadequate infrastructure and security concerns. A multimodal strategy involving infrastructure development, cultural preservation, marketing tactics, and policy frameworks is required to fully realize Nigeria's tourist potential (Okpoko & Okafor, 2021). Adeyanju (2020) emphasizes further how important it is to establish marketing plans, infrastructure, and legislative changes to fully realize the potential of Nigeria's tourist sector. Digital platforms provide tourist groups with an opportunity to interact with potential visitors, address their questions and concerns, and promote a positive image of the nation. These platforms provide tourists with accurate information on customs, beliefs, and the local populace, enabling them to make well-informed decisions about their travel plans. Nigeria has the ability to realize its unrealized tourism potential and develop into a vibrant and dynamic destination that promotes economic growth and cross-cultural exchange, provided that it adopts a comprehensive strategy that takes these important aspects into account.

Methodology | The methodology employed by this study is a mix technique involving qualitative and exploratory research design to generate knowledge and a better understanding of tourism and cultural heritage in Nigeria. The review includes academic journals, industry reports, periodic government publications, industry publications, and online information.   This is the main instrument used to conduct and gather insights into existing tourism and a method supported by the studies of Hassan (2022), and Adejumo (2023). The study focuses on Osun -State in the southwest because of its huge potential for tourism....locations and cultural tourism...but lack of planning and huge investment in infrastructure and marketing communications...for example, there is a need to have a food gateway road... Gbongan-Osogbo road and the airport must be completed to connect other states and regions. This study used international benchmarks and compared Nigeria's tourism industry with those of similar countries such as Portugal, Morrocco, Italy, and Dubai regarding cultural diversity, natural resources, and tourism policies. Cutting-edge research in the tourism industry is underway in Nigeria, focusing on pinpointing the most prominent tourism hubs and the government regulations that elevate them to global prominence. Such findings could revolutionize the field, opening up a world of thrilling travel opportunities in the years ahead. Osun alone has sixty-two (62) tourist attractions such as Osun-Osogbo Groove, Erin-Ijesa waterfall, Ayankunnugba in Oke-Ila, Nike Gallery, Ododuwa Shrine and Grove, and Queen Moremi Statue. This study intends to allow valuable insights into best practices and potential areas for improvement.

Main Results and Contributions | The study adds to the conversation on maximizing Nigeria's enormous modern-day tourism potential. Studies carried out in a number of industrialized countries have shown that tourism can significantly influence the distribution and growth of wealth within many nations. Due to their booming tourism sectors, places like Portugal, Morocco, Italy, and Dubai have seen tremendous economic expansion. Portugal has become a very popular travel destination

due to its amazing landscapes, rich cultural history, and variety of attractions. Portugal has seen a steady rise in tourists in recent years as more people become aware of the country's tourism potential. From the historic streets of Lisbon and Porto to the beautiful beaches of the Algarve and the lush vineyards of the Douro Valley, Portugal has something to offer every traveler. The recent report of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) shows that Portugal tourism sector is a significant contributor to its economy, generating 23.1% of the total GDP and providing over 1.1 million jobs in 2020. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, Portugal has demonstrated resilience, with efforts to promote sustainable tourism and adapt to changing traveler preferences. In addition, it was reported on social media that based on available data from the Ministry of Tourism over 2.1 million tourists visited Morocco in the first two months of 2024. The figure is expected to increase by 2026 due to several initiatives by Morocco's National Tourism Office (ONMT) to attract international partners and appeal to more tourists from around the world. One of the recent initiatives is a partnership with United Airlines, which will be the first airline to operate a flight between Marrakech and New York. According to Galuppo et al. (2020), Tourism accounts for 10% of employment worldwide and 10% of GDP. It is anticipated that tourism will continue to play a major role in the global creation of jobs and socioeconomic development. By 2030, it is expected to contribute 1.8 billion jobs globally and 15.6 billion jobs domestically (World Tourism Organization and International Transport Forum, 2019). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2020 study states that in 2019, Italy's GDP contributions, both direct and indirect, totaled 13%. Additionally, in 2018, the tourist sector employed 2 million people, or 8% of the labor force. In 2018, the tourism industry accounted for around 40% of all service exports. The study carried out by Vij and Rizwan (2022) explores how Dubai uses technology to give tourists digital experiences. This research investigates how Dubai's tourism administration might be improved by implementing a range of technological innovations, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and service digitization. According to Mastercard's Global Destination Cities Index, with 15.93 million foreign overnight visitors in 2019, Dubai is still the fourth most visited city worldwide. Many developing nations, like Nigeria, now rely heavily on tourism as a source of revenue (Diminyi et al., 2022). Nigeria's tourism history began in 1953, while the nation was still ruled by the British Empire, with the first attempts to capitalize on its tourism resources (Diminyi & Okpoko, 2017). Nigeria's tourist industry still lags behind other emerging countries despite these efforts. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2019), tourism has grown to be a significant worldwide export industry, and fostering its expansion is thought to be an important way to combat poverty and promote local economic progress. Cultural tourism has garnered significant attention and importance in recent times owing to its ecological practices and economic advantages. In both rural and urban areas, it is being used more and more as a tool to promote regional development (ICSSPE, 2010). In areas with distinct cultures, cultural tourism has continuously increased due to tourists' growing curiosity about the art and history of a place (Martine, 2018). In addition to

providing visitors with an opportunity to engage directly with the community and experience the local way of life and cultural manifestations, traditional festivals also allow visitors to fully immerse themselves in the unique cultural history and character of the destination. According to Ekundayo (2018), community involvement is crucial to ensure that the local community benefits from the industry, which in turn has a significant impact on tourists' perceptions and expectations. Experts have examined Nigeria's historical, natural, and cultural facets, and the country has enormous tourism potential (Afolabi & Adeyinka 2020; Okoli et al. 2021). According to studies, promoting a favorable image of the nation and raising tourist satisfaction depend heavily on the efficient use of ICT. Destination marketing agencies need to work together to manage user-generated content and promote Nigeria as a major participant in the global tourism scene in order to fully realize the country's tourism potential. Lastly, this study adds to the conversation about how to take advantage of Nigeria's enormous tourism potential in the technological age. Furthermore, the efficient use of ICT contributes to a positive perception of a nation by raising visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and the inclination to visit. Travelers' decisions are influenced by a nation's image. To ensure a positive image, DMOs should manage user-generated content. Nigeria must use these findings to unlock its tourism potential and establish itself as a global tourism player.

Limitations | Nigeria has a lot to offer tourists, including an intriguing blend of historical sites, scenic beauty, and cultural diversity. However, the nation's ability to realize this potential is hampered by a number of issues. One such obstacle is a lack of suitable infrastructure, which can impede the growth of amenities related to tourism and detract from the experiences of tourists. These barriers included inadequate transportation networks, poor road conditions, and restricted access to basic utilities like electricity and water, according to research by Afolayan et al. (2020). Furthermore, tourists' unfavorable opinions of safety are influenced by ongoing security issues, such as terrorist attacks, banditry, and kidnappings. These security concerns discourage potential visitors and limit the growth of the tourism sector (Ikeke and Agha, 2021). The political landscape of Nigeria is marked by frequent changes of leadership, accusations of corruption, and disputes among the sociopolitical class. Political unrest can affect efforts to expand the tourism industry and breed uncertainty for investors (Oladepo, 2020). Furthermore, the unfavorable views that foreigners have of Nigeria are influenced by the media's portrayal of the country as being unstable, corrupt, and full of crime. Nigeria's tourist potential can only be increased by managing and enhancing its image (Okpoko and Okafor, 2021). In addition, Nigeria's tourist industry is beset by a dearth of national and international marketing and promotion initiatives. In order to draw tourists to Nigeria and increase knowledge of its tourism products, successful marketing tactics are crucial (Oni & Akindele, 2022).

Conclusions | In conclusion, utilizing Nigeria's tourist industry calls for the appropriate plans and financial commitments to make sure that Nigeria has the capacity to become a thriving, long-term travel destination in the contemporary world. The construction of infrastructure, legislative changes, community involvement, and marketing plans that highlight Nigeria's distinctive natural and cultural resources should all be included in this endeavor. Nigeria can proudly boast an extraordinarily broad spectrum of cultural, historical, and natural attractions, from energetic cities and cultural events to magnificent landscapes and animals. Nevertheless, the resources are still mostly unexplored. Nigeria's tourist sector is resilient and driven to overcome challenges and build on its strengths despite security concerns and unfavorable preconceptions. In addition, the involvement of local communities in the development of tourism is crucial for sustainable growth, and enabling communities to reap the rewards of tourism not only promotes economic growth but also elevates the genuineness of visitor experiences. The expansion of the tourism sector is significantly influenced by government initiatives. Nigeria has lately improved its potential as a tourism destination by investing in infrastructure and making changes to its policies. Nigeria can rise to prominence in the world tourism business with the appropriate benchmarks and tactics. Therefore, a promising avenue for future research could involve examining the efficacy of various technological tools such as augmented reality (AR), virtual tours, mobile applications, and data analytics in attracting tourists, enhancing their engagement with local attractions, and facilitating sustainable tourism practices. However, by tapping into its diverse landscapes, vibrant culture, and historical heritage, Nigeria can emerge as a formidable player in the global tourism arena, fostering economic prosperity while celebrating its unique identity on the world stage. Stakeholders must seize this opportunity and work collaboratively towards harnessing Nigeria's tourism potential for the benefit of its people and the world at large.

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