ANALYSING INBOUND TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

It is almost axiomatic to state that a destination's image determines to a large extent its allure and subsequently, its level of patronage. Though image can be formed either by a marketing agency or from the experiences of the tourist, it is the impressions of the tourist which appear to give a true and a more plausible representation of what pertains in the destination. In this regard, post trip perceptions are important to understanding the perspective of the tourist. This paper aims at collating such views and exploring the underpinning socio-demographic dynamics.

In this study, five hundred departing tourists were chosen using the accidental sampling method over a four month period, and their views on various qualitative aspects of the tourist product, including safety and security, purpose of visit, and service quality, were solicited. The Chi-square and One-way Anova results show that socio-demographic variables such as age, sex and continent of origin shape tourists' perceptions of the country.

Introduction

It has long been recognised that a destination's image determines its appeal to potential tourists (Brown, 2000, Holycomb and Pizam, 2006). Of particular importance is safety and security (Crotts, 1996). Consequently, it is not uncommon to observe most destination marketing efforts stressing safety, hospitable people and value for money.

Generally, image can be formed from two main perspectives: first, it can be created (either by official sources or by a marketing agency), and secondly, it can emanate from an actual experience of the tourist (Mayo, 1973; Henkel et al, 2006). Of the many factors that affect visitors' formation of destination image, past visitation and stereotypes appear to

be dominant. Zaher and Kim (2006), for example, found significant differences in destination image between past visitors and non visitors. They further observed that past visitation has an effect on repeat visits. Holycomb and Pizam (2006), however, did not find any such link. Asli Tasci, Selma Meydan, and Tamer Cavusgil (2006), found from their study of Turkey that image is shaped more by stereotypical conceptions than by factual information.

Residential status also appears to have some influence on perception. Henkel et al (2006) reported differing perceptions between guests and local Thai residents. While the international visitors saw nightlife and entertainment as the key attractions, the locals felt that cultural sightseeing, friendly people and food were the most important attributes of the destination.

In their bid to attract tourist inflows, African countries are mostly confronted with the difficult task of dealing with a negative image (Teye 1988, Ankomah and Crompton, 1990) in a bid to draw tourists into the region. Ironically, many first-time visitors to the continent are surprised at the gap between the negative stereotypes they have been fed with and their actual experiences.

The literature offers divergent opinions on the time of image formation. While some authors, led by Goth (1997), believe the image is formed before the actual trip, others (e.g., Go and Gover, 2003) assert that it is difficult for tourists to form a clear image of a destination without the actual experience. Schofield et al (2005) found that one's image of a destination tends to become more favourable with increasing visitation and familiarity. They also observed that though visitor image was more positive than non-visitor image, socio-economic and behavioural variables did not influence image perception.

Regardless of when or where it is formed, perception of the destination is an important contributor to any country's successful foray into the tourism arena. Unfortunately, studies which address post trip perceptions are underrepresented in the literature. With the notable exception of Abanga and Abane (2003) and Amenumey (2003) who surveyed tourist perceptions of some aspects of Ghana's destination appeal, little academic work has been done in the area of assessing tourists' post trip experiences after patronising the country. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine the post trip impressions of inbound tourists to Ghana, laying emphasis on the socio-demographic dynamics of these perceptions.

The Case of Ghana and the Importance of Tourism.

The importance of tourism to the local economy appears to be growing with time. Since 1985, tourist arrivals in Ghana have grown more than 200% to the current 851000. Tourism is currently the fourth highest contributor to the nation's foreign exchange earnings and contributes some 6% to GDP while employing more than 250,000 people, both directly indirectly (Ghana Statistical Service, 2006). The similar picture when considering the receipts which have also grown to the current 1.5 billion dollars. Furthermore, the sector is becoming increasingly important to the local economy for three main reasons. First, incomes from the country's two main export items, Cocoa and Gold, tend (at best) to fluctuate, thereby rendering expected income from them unpredictable. Secondly, receipts from tourism have shown a steady 7-10% increase over the past 10 years. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, tourism is the only one of the country's top four foreign exchange earners whose contribution to Gross Domestic Product and government revenue has increased consistently over the past five years (Bank of Ghana, 2006). Added to these is the fact that revenue from Hotels and Restaurants Customers' tax grew from GH 24 million in 2000 to Gh 65.3 million (approximately $7m) in 2003, a 173% increase. Also, the number of hotels in the 3star plus category has grown by almost 50% with increasing occupancy rates over the past five years (Ghana Tourist Board, 2008). These figures, coupled with increasing arrivals, paint the picture of an expanding sector.

As a destination, Ghana markets itself as a country with a rich, diverse culture and hospitable people. Other attractions include the famed Kakum National Park and its Canopy (which won the British Airways Ecotourism for Tomorrow award for sustainable tourism development in 2000) and the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles which are designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites because of their importance in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Monkey sanctuaries, waterfalls, and beaches are among the other attractions

A study of this nature therefore becomes imperative in the light of the growing importance of tourism to the local economy. Since international tourists constitute the major end user of the product, it is important that continuous monitoring of their perceptions be done to inform both policy-makers and industry of their (the tourist's) needs. Understanding tourist satisfaction is key to establishing the performance of destinations. Given the increasing level of competitiveness, it is essential for destination management authorities to understand the main factors causing

satisfaction / dissatisfaction for visitors (Korzay & Alvarez, 2005, Henkel et al, 2006).

Method

Though some information in this regard is collected annually by the Ghana Tourist Board, it cannot be relied upon for a study of this nature for two reasons: the type of data collected does not support an in-depth exploration of the visitors' perceptions of their experiences because it only solicits general statements about service quality such as "very satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," and "dissatisfied," without soliciting the reasons for such answers. Secondly, not only is the data collected difficult to access, but also the findings are rarely published. Even when released, the information focuses on economic indices such as visitation rates and the attendant importance to the economy and does not address visitor experiences and how the sector can collaborate to make the country a better destination.

The Five hundred returning tourists who were covered in the survey were sampled using the accidental method at the departure hall of the Kotoka International Airport between June and August 2006. Every 5th tourist who completed immigration departure formalities was interviewed and no more than 10 people were interviewed in a day. These checks were to prevent the dominance of the survey by large group tourists whose nationality and socio-demographics are likely to be homogenous. The structured interview schedule was used to solicit both open and close ended answers. The nature of the sampling made the figure attainable because once a potential respondent declined to participate, the next person was chosen and the process continued until the number was attained. George (2003) and Brunt et al (1999) employed similar approaches in their respective studies on South Africa and Scotland. Holcomb & Pizam (2006) studied multiple destinations in the United States of America using a similar approach.

Ideally, it would have been prudent to interview tourists at different attraction sites. However, experience from the pretesting of the questionnaire indicates that they move in groups, which suggests a fixed itinerary with little time for relaxation, let alone interviewing on site. The survey had four modules (please refer to appendix). Respondent perceptions of service quality were measured on a 1-5 likert scale. Others (such as opinion on availability of good roads and others) were also dichotomised on an 'agree'- 'disagree' continuum. Age as a variable was recoded into three categories: <30yrs (young); 31-49 (middle aged) and

50+ (elderly). Gender, continent of origin and vacation preference were employed as the independent variables. The Chi-square test of independence and one-way ANOVA analysis were used to explore relationships and differences in perceptions.

Profile of respondents

The majority (348 or 68%) was visiting for the first time and formed part of small groups (ranging from 1-5 people). Europeans had the largest proportion of repeat visitors (35%). Most respondents spent between 1 and 3 weeks, and while Europeans and North Americans travelled in larger groups (15+), their African and Asian counterparts tended to travel either alone or in very small groups (less than 5). The main sources of information on Ghana were friends and family (67%) and the internet (31%). Others included Ghanaian missions abroad as well as travel guides whose information focused largely on security and visa acquisition procedures. Worth noting is the dominance of the word-of mouth method through friends and family.

Vacation preference was clustered into two broad genres of activities: rest/relaxation and activity oriented. These were found to have some association with age and marital status. In terms of *age*, the youth and middle aged both cited relaxation as the main purpose for their visit; however, the elderly (50years+) visited Ghana for a cultural experience and for activities which 'enabled them to be closer to the locals'.

As regards marital status, respondents who were divorced and widowed tended to prefer an activity-oriented trip as opposed to the married, separated and single, who preferred more rest and relaxation. Thus type of vacation preference differed significantly by marital status ($\chi^2 = 28.8$, df =4, p<0.01). What is surprising is the preference of the relatively younger people for rest and relaxation. Perhaps, the answer has to do with the idea of personal security, as the literature points to similar scenarios (e.g. Demos, 1992) where elderly people appear to be more adventurous.

In terms of occupation, students formed the single largest category 40 % (or 198) of visitors to the country. Most of them were single post graduates (67%). This is a departure from the known distribution of tourists (GTB, 2007) which identifies formal workers to be in the majority. An explanation can be proffered: currently there is an increase in short-term educational visits to Ghana by North American and British Universities . Students from these institutions spend between two and four weeks of the second semester of the University's academic year [during the summer?], and are accompanied by their professors and other academic staff. Such persons may well be considered tourists because they spend at least one night at the destination, spend income not earned at the destination

and pursue non-remunerative activities at the destination (Gee et al, 1989). The rest (60%) were employed in both formal and informal sectors as well as volunteer and aid-related organisations.

Visitor Perceptions of Ghana.

The study aimed at understanding tourist views about Ghana and exploring the socio-demographic dynamics of such views. The main determinants used in this regard were age, gender, continent of origin and purpose of visit. In this section, the main findings are reported and the age, gender, continent of residence and purpose of visit dynamics are explored. Tourist views were sought on the following issues: *service quality, hospitality, safety and security, desire to return to Ghana, likes/dislikes*, and the overall experience in Ghana. The results of a one-way Anova analysis of their responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of One-way Anova test on perceptions by demographic variables

Demographic Varia bles	N	Service Quality	Hospitality	Overall experience	Safety	Likes	Dislike
AGE		F=3.969*	F= 1.729	F=13.499**	F=5.194*	F=7.775*	F = 9.376*
<30	230	2.8043	1.3636	1.9318	1.2889	.2.8222	7.0698

	N						
31-49	215	2.6047	1.3095	1.6190	1.1628	2.4773	5.8947
50+	50	2.3000	1.4444	1.9000	1.2000	3.4444	7.7143
GENDER		F= 1.015	F = 6.289	F= 3.915*	F=20.626**	F=1.057	F = 6.303*
Male	260	2.6346	1.2857	1.7800	1.1176	2.8039	6.4667
Female	230	2.7174	1.4222	1.8222	1.3478	2.6522	6.8810
CONTINENT OF ORIGIN		F=18.15*	F = 10.574*	F = 15.238*	F= 17.89**	F= 2.54*	F=17.994**
Europe	280	2.7857	1.3846	1.6667	1.2182	2.8000	7.0417
North America	170	2.4412	1.2353	1.8485	1.1429	2.6000	5.4412
Asia	5	4.0000	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000	2.0000	7.0000
Africa	30	1.8333	1.3333	2.1667	1.6000	2.4000	10.6667
VAC. PREFERENCE		F =.050	F =.763	F =5.5538	F =.143	F =.173	F =0.082
Rest and relaxation	285	2.6842	1.3036	1.7500	1.2281	2.6842	6.6538
Activity oriented	190	2.6579	1.3429	1.8947	1.2432	2.8108	6.6250

source, fieldwork, 2007

* =   F ratio significant at 0. 05 level
** =   F ratio significant at 0.01 level

Service Quality

Quality of service was the item with the lowest positive ranking. Approximately half of all respondents ranked service quality between very poor and average. Significant differences in terms of gender, place of residence and age were discovered. More males rated service positively than females [$(\chi^2$, n=490, df, 4) = 68.098$; p<0.05$].

Those who visited the country for rest and relaxation tended to rate service quality higher than their counterparts who were in the country for activity related holidays, [χ^2 (475, 5) = 43.526$; p<0.05$]. Differences by place of residence were observed. While the respondents from Asia felt service was 'poor,' 83% of African respondents were of the view that service

quality was 'very good.' Slightly more than half of Americans and 69.2% of Europeans perceived service quality to be poor. Thus, in effect, it was only the Africans who saw service quality as 'good' ($F=18.034$, $p<0.05$). Tukey's HSD analysis also identified Africans as having significantly different views from those from other continents. Differences in perception were also evident across the various age groups ($\chi^2=367.369$, df= 20). The middle aged (31-49 age group) found service quality to range between poor and very poor while the elderly were more impressed with service quality.

As can be inferred, tourists in the country for cultural attractions tend more to embrace   local standards (Cohen, 1979, Mekercher and Bob, 2003). As observed earlier, this 50+ group were those who visited the country mainly for cultural purposes.

Hospitality of Ghanaians

The majority of respondents (310 or 65.3%) found Ghanaians to be hospitable, confirming the generally held assertion captured in many promotional brochures and websites, that citizens of the country are welcoming to visitors. In spite of the generally positive ratings, there were a few differences. In terms of gender, females tended to see the country as more inhospitable than males did ($\chi^2=142$ df= 20, $p<0.05$). With regard to place of residence, respondents from Asia were found to have significantly different views from those from other continents, with the F ratio=10.574.

Cross tabulations revealed that all the Asian respondents (100%) felt that Ghana is not a hospitable tourist destination. Europeans and the second largest proportion of respondents disagreeing with the assertion ($\chi^2=$ 39.214, df =4, n=475). Though not statistically significant, the differences by age are worth noting. The elderly group had the greatest proportion of its members (45%) describing Ghanaians as inhospitable. Hence Asians and Europeans felt that Ghana is not hospitable.

Safety and Security

Most respondents (448 or 85%) thought Ghana was a safe destination. The main reason assigned was, "there was no attempt on my life" (340 or 76%). Females and Africans (25 or 75%)   were more likely to view Ghana as an unsafe destination than their male counterparts and those living in other continents respectively. Again, all the Asians (100%) saw

the country as being safe. Perhaps the most marked differences in perception related to the different age groups. A significantly high proportion (74%) of the youth (aged below 30) disagreed with the statement that Ghana is a secure destination [χ^2 (475,4) = 27.03 p<0.05]. Thus the youth tended to feel more insecure. Further analysis (one-way Anova) singled out their perceptions of safety and security as differing significantly from those of the other age subgroups. This finding is similar to those made by George (2003) in Cape Town and Pinhey and Iverson (1994). Younger people tend to feel unsafe at destinations, though women and older people are more concerned about their personal safety (Stanko, 2000).

Likelihood of Repeat Visit

Their dislikes notwithstanding, there was an almost unanimous (90.1%) desire among respondents to both return to Ghana and recommend the country as a choice destination to their friends and acquaintances. This is consistent with an earlier finding by Holycomb and Pizam (2006) to the effect that negative experiences (specifically being a victim of theft) do not automatically imply cessation of future visits.

Asians and Africans had greater proportions of people willing to return—100 and 75 percent respectively. Europeans were found to have the highest proportion of respondents not likely to return (12.5%). It is worth noting that 95% of those who would not visit Ghana again said they wanted to explore other African countries. The middle aged group (31-49) had the highest proportion (35%) of respondents not willing to return. Perhaps, their decision not to return is fuelled by the desire to explore as much of the continent as they can since they have the wherewithal. Strikingly, all (40 or 100%) those aged 50 and above said they would like to visit Ghana again. Thus, repeat visitation was found to vary by age and place of residence but not by gender or vacation preference.

Likes and dislikes

Overall, the culture and friendliness of the people was the most liked item about Ghana (67.3%, Table 2) However, there were some internal differences by age and continent of origin. The elderly liked the weather most while the majority of respondents in the other age groups saw people and culture as the most likeable thing about Ghana. The much-touted Ghanaian hospitality seems to be confirmed in this instance.

Table 2: summary of likes and dislikes

LIKES	n	%
Friendliness of people and culture	310	67.3
Natural beauty	90	18
Food	35	7
Weather	30	6
Safety and Security	20	4
Art and heritage	15	3
Total	500	100
DISLIKES		n
%		
Poor Sanitation	305	61
Service quality	152	30.4
*'Obroni'	25	5
Other (weather, food, cost of travel to Ghana)	18	4.6
Total	**500**	**100**

*Obroni is an Akan -word for a white person.

As will be noted from Table 2, the majority of respondents (305 or 61%) cited poor sanitation as their major dislike of Ghana as a destination. Specifically mentioned were the beaches and other major tourist sites. Another regularly disliked thing about Ghana was the constant reference to them as "obroni," a local term which connotes the idea of a light-skinned visitor. According to the respondents, it tends to make them feel somewhat unwelcome. It is worth noting that all those who mentioned "obroni" as the most disliked item were [black?] North Americans. This finding supports earlier findings by Abanga (2003) and Amenumey (2003) in which similar sentiments were expressed.

The likes and dislikes of tourists were found to differ significantly by place of residence and age. For the North Americans and Europeans it was poor sanitation, but for the Asians, the most disliked aspect of the destination was the cost of travel. Further analysis revealed that the North Americans and Europeans liked a wider array of attributes than their African and Asian counterparts. For example, all the Asians favourably mentioned the food while the Africans tended to like the culture and natural beauty (but not the food). In the case of the Europeans it was culture, natural heritage, food, safety and art in order of preference. Significant differences were observed among the age groups in terms of likes and dislikes about the destination. The most common dislike for the

less than 30 and 31-49 age groups was sanitation and the attitude of local people. For the 50+ age group it included the weather and infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the <30 age group identified cost of travel to Ghana and movement in Ghana as one of their dislikes.

Overall experience

Generally, the majority of respondents (450 or 85%) reported that their experiences ranged from "satisfactory" to "highly satisfactory". A lower percentage (73%), though, was of the view that their pre-trip expectations of Ghana had been fulfilled. Yet there were differences by age. The elderly were the most satisfied with Ghana (X^2 (480, 4)= 60.128; p<0.05) and it is not surprising therefore that all of them indicated their desire to visit the destination again.

Complementary Attributes.

The tourist product is complementary in nature (Page et al, 2001; Gee et al, 1989), thus there are other goods and services that tourists tend to patronize (either directly or indirectly). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on certain statements relating to the nature of supporting services in Ghana.

The results are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Tourists' Perceptions of complementary attributes

Statement	SA	A	ID	DA
			SD	
Vibrant Nightlife 18(3.8%)	50 (10)	62(12.1)	50(10)	232 (46.3)
Good Transport 44(8.8)	112 (22.5)	144(28.8)	150(30)	112 (22.5)
Expensive Destination 75(18.8)	17(3.8)	75(18.8)	75(18.8)	160 (40)
Favourable Climate 13(2.5)	110(26.3)	168(34)	125(25)	50 (10)
Good Health and sanitation 169(33.9)	13(2.5)	69(13.9)	88(17.5)	131(26.3)
Reasonable Accommodation 14(2.7)	69(13.9)	219 (43.8)	138(27.5)	50(10)
Good roads in Ghana 183 (36.3)	15(3)	104(19.8)	41(8.2)	138(27.5)
Quality of food 7 (1.5)	88(17.5)	194(38.8)	138(27.5)	63(12.5)
High cost of access 25(5)	113(22.5)	200(40)	75(15)	63(12.6)

A close look at the figures in Table 3 points to some consistency in the responses of tourists. The percentages realised here tend to confirm earlier findings in the work. For example, close to 64% disagreed with the assertion that the "Sanitation situation is good." Most respondents disagreed with the positive statements about certain expected attributes of the destination (vibrant nightlife, good transport, and good roads, among others). Worth noting is the high percentage who agreed with the assertion that cost of travelling to Ghana is unreasonably high, which confirms earlier observations by Teye (1998). It is little wonder, then, that one key suggestion from the tourists concerned reducing airfares.

Discussion

The marked differences in perceptions suggest the existence of very well defined market segments/niches, complete with their own constructions of quality. For example, Asians and Africans have more negative perceptions than visitors from other continents. On the other hand, elderly tourists appear to like (or accept) the country more. Again, the results suggest that

middle aged females are the most dissatisfied patrons of Ghana's tourism product because they tend to find the country inhospitable and insecure and are less likely to repeat visit. Furthermore, the <30 age group tend to be more critical of services and the general tourism product and need palpable evidence to be convinced to revisit.

All destinations yearn for repeat visits, thus it is important that careful attention is given to the views (especially the negative ones) of the tourists. Three key issues emerging from this study are the poor service quality, poor sanitation, and the labelling of tourists as "obroni." These are discussed in turn.

The first concerns service quality. As already observed, most tourists felt that the quality of service they received is poor. This has long been a problem and has been identified on numerous occasions by the Ministry of Tourism. Policy makers and service providers have a joint responsibility to ensure that quality service is provided. This can be done through sustained training workshops and certification. The way forward is to strengthen the capacity of local training institutions in various aspects of the highly fragmented tourism service. It appears some earlier plans by the then [when is "then"?] Ministry of Tourism to train 8000 frontline staff have fallen through. In designing a new training programme, there is the need for a greater collaboration with the research and training institutions, especially the Universities and Polytechnics, which can be tasked with developing and synchronising training manuals to ensure standard training at all levels of hospitality and tourism training. Technical assistance can also be sought from countries with expertise in the field of hospitality, notably North African Countries such as Mauritius, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. Over the past few years some of these countries have offered some programmes to   practitioners in the industry. There is the need to further consolidate and perhaps even institutionalise such training programmes.

The second emergent subject pertains to host responsibilities. As observed from the study, sanitation and being described as "Obroni" were the two key tourist   dislikes about Ghana. It is time that host communities were educated not only about the benefits and costs of tourism but also about their responsibilities towards sustainable tourism. Such responsibilities would include keeping environments clean and free from filth. One way is to involve the local people in the management of beach resources in order to make them identify better with ownership and provide their support and protection in this regard. The sensitisation must emphasise that keeping

their surroundings clean works first for themselves, and then the tourist, and not the other way round. The education can be undertaken by statutory bodies, pressure groups, NGOs or even school groups. Training institutions and the National Commission on Civic Education can be tasked with developing manuals for sensitizing local communities on these host-guest issues. As regards the labelling of people as "obroni," the education should be directed at the tourists themselves not to feel offended since in most cases the term is not used in a pejorative manner.

Thirdly, the low rating returned on the supporting attributes of the destination (Table 3) reflects two fundamental flaws inherent in Ghana's tourist product which combine to shorten the stay of the tourist: lack of integration and lack of diversification. Lack of integration lies in the absence of supporting activities to the main attractions, and lack of diversification is evident in the little conscious effort by the nation to identify and develop new attractions to complement the existing ones. For example, due to their proximity to the capital, Accra, visits to attractions in Cape Coast and Elmina can be completed within half a day, providing the traveller ample return time. If, for example, the Cape Coast and Elmina townships could develop arts and other entertainment packages that would last long enough to "force" the tourist to spend a night at the destination, there would be greater benefit.

There is the need for Regional and District Authorities to begin mapping out strategies to (1) identify and develop new attractions and (2), promote their regions or districts as single entities, with each complementing another. Again, tourist attractions need more infrastructure. There are many tourist attractions in Ghana whose beauty is marred by poor infrastructure- a poor access road, no electricity, no washroom nor receptive facilities, to mention a few. This has long been a problem (Teye, 1988; Boakye and Dei, 2004) and the time is ripe for an aggressive investment drive in tourism. The private sector can focus on the provision of superstructure while government (through the District Assemblies) can concern itself with providing basic infrastructure for key tourist attractions.

Conclusion and Areas for Further Study

Though the general ratings for Ghana as a tourist destination are high, there is the need for greater work. The age-, sex-, and continent of origin-based differences in perceptions point to the possible existence of distinct market segments which need to be identified and matched with specialised

tourism products. This implies that Ghana must adopt a paradigm shift from the practice of providing a general tourism product to a series of market-driven specific tourism products in tandem with the various market segments. For future studies, emphasis can be placed on in-depth studies into these different market segments and how they can be exploited for the destination's benefit.

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