Driving Domestic Tourism: An Analysis Of Travel Motivations And Behavior At A Nigerian Resort

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ABSTRACT: *Understanding the travel motivations of domestic tourists is crucial for the development of Nigeria's burgeoning tourism sector. While extensive research exists on tourist behavior globally, a significant gap remains regarding the specific drivers of resort tourism within the Nigerian context. This study aims to identify the key motivational factors influencing Nigerian tourists' decisions to visit a local resort and to determine their relative importance. An empirical survey was conducted, collecting data from 201 respondents via on-site and email questionnaires at a resort in Nigeria. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and factor analysis. The analysis revealed five primary motivational dimensions: Rest and Relaxation, Recreational Activities, Enriching and Learning Experiences, Social Experiences, and Personal Values. Among these, Rest and Relaxation emerged as the most significant motivator (Mean=3.63), while Personal Values were the least influential. The findings indicate that for the surveyed demographic—predominantly middle-aged, educated, and family-oriented Nigerians—the resort's primary appeal is its function as a sanctuary for escape and rejuvenation. The study concludes that marketing strategies and service delivery for Nigerian resorts must be strategically aligned with these core motivators to effectively capture and grow the domestic tourism market.*

KEYWORDS: Travel Behavior, Travel Motivation, Domestic Tourism, Resorts, Nigeria, Factor Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Travel blogs have become a vital resource in the travel planning process, offering prospective tourists firsthand accounts and insights into potential destinations. The proliferation of social media and online platforms has further amplified their popularity and influence on travelers' perceptions and choices. Using Nigeria as a case study, this research investigates the specific role travel blogs play in shaping destination imagery.

The global tourism industry is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economic sectors (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2005; Cooper & Hall, 2008). As a key component of the service economy, it wields significant economic influence worldwide (Kay, 2003; Koc, 2004; Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008). The industry's continued growth depends heavily on tourist travel decisions and behavior. Within this context, destination choice remains a critical area of study (Papatheodorou, 2006). This choice is influenced by a multitude of factors, including culture, finances, past experiences, and travel motivations (Ankomah, Crompton, & Baker, 1996). As Cooper and Hall (2008) note, tourism distribution is determined by a complex set of influences. Among these, travel motivation is a fundamental element of travel behavior, extensively researched and leveraged in tourism marketing. Ultimately, it is the desire "to see the unseen and know the unknown" that drives people to explore new places (Venkatesh, 2006).

Consequently, for tourism providers like resorts, understanding tourist behavior—and more specifically, travel motivations—is essential. This knowledge can inform product development, refine marketing strategies, improve service delivery, and ultimately create a competitive advantage. Travel behavior is thus a critical concept that underpins the tourism industry and economy, warranting detailed investigation.

Travel behavior encompasses the actions and decisions of tourists before, during, and after a trip. It arises from the continuous interaction between an individual's personal variables and external environmental factors. This concept considers the influence of both people and situations, as well as the resulting reactions and choices. In essence, Travel behavior can be defined as the conduct of tourists, shaped by their attitudes toward a product and their subsequent response to its use (George, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005). According to March and Woodside (2005), specific travel decisions encompass one or more behavioral intentions. These intentions are driven by the need to act in a manner suited to highly defined situations. To accurately predict travel behavior, one must understand the interplay between individual characteristics and situational factors. This involves analyzing the positive and negative evaluative criteria that influence tourist destination choices (Holloway, 2004; Laws, 1995; March & Woodside, 2006).

Scholars have identified a range of factors that shape tourist behavior, including motivation, personal attitudes, and various situational and environmental influences that affect the individual's experience (Laws, 1995; Venkatesh, 2006). Among these, motivation is a primary driver, initiating the decision-making process when a need cannot be fulfilled in one's home environment (Gartner, as cited in Pike, 2008). This impetus to satisfy a specific need is a critical variable, directly influencing travel decisions

and subsequent satisfaction levels (Chang, 2007; Correia, Oom do Valle, & Moço, 2006). Many researchers consider travel motivation to be one of the most significant psychological influences on tourist behavior (George, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005).

Motivation is defined as an internal state or desire that prompts an individual to act in a particular way, thereby directing and sustaining behavior and energy (Decrop, 2006; George, 2004). One of the most frequently cited theories for explaining motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which outlines five fundamental goals: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization (Tikkanen, 2007). In a tourism context, these motivations can manifest as a need to escape, relax, relieve tension, or pursue "sunlust" reasons. Crompton (as cited in Saayman, 2006) further identified seven key socio-psychological motivators: escaping a mundane environment, self-discovery, relaxation and recreation, prestige, regression, enhancing family bonds, and facilitating social interaction.

Given that motivations directly impact tourist decisions, understanding them is crucial for analyzing travel behavior (George, 2004). Consequently, numerous studies have been dedicated to analyzing travel motivations to gain a deeper understanding of this complex behavior (e.g., Crompton, 1977; Law, Cheung, & Lo, 2004; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Correia, Oom do Valle, & Moco, 2007; Saayman, Slabbert, & van der Merwe, 2009). Consequently, travel behaviour and motivation are established as significant areas of study within tourism research (Huang & Xiao, 2000; Lam & Hsu, 2006). Accurately predicting behaviour and understanding motivation are vital for tourism marketing, as they help generate demand and facilitate tourist decision-making (Decrop, 2006; Holloway, 2004; Mazanec et al., 2001; March & Woodside, 2006). This understanding enables the development and implementation of effective strategies and policies to stimulate tourism demand (Law et al., 2004; March & Woodside, 2005; Papatheodorou, 2006).

While research on travel motives is abundant, a clear gap exists regarding the specific motivations of resort tourists. A review of the literature identified only two similar studies, neither conducted in South Africa. Correia, Oom do Valle, and Moço (2007) explored motivations for travelling to exotic locales, while Chang (2007) analyzed the motives of package tour travellers. Chang's (2007) findings highlighted relaxation/pleasure, social relationships, socio-economic factors, and socio-psychological needs. In contrast, Correia et al. (2007) identified knowledge-seeking, leisure, socialisation, facilities, core attractions, and landscape features as key motivators for exotic travel.

Beyond socialization and leisure, these two studies show little correlation, underscoring that tourist motivations are often destination- and traveler-specific. This discrepancy reinforces the value of the present research. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the travel behavior of visitors to a South African resort by analyzing their travel motivations and comparing the findings with other relevant studies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an empirical survey conducted at a Nigerian resort. A descriptive questionnaire was developed based on an analysis of prior research. Data collection occurred in two phases. The first survey was administered on-site at a resort in a popular Nigerian tourist region. It was conducted over a peak holiday weekend. Using an availability sampling method, fieldworkers distributed 150 questionnaires to willing and available tourists, with only one questionnaire provided per family. Of these, 102 completed questionnaires were usable for data analysis. The second survey was distributed via email during another high season. Potential respondents were identified from the resort's database, specifically targeting tourists who had visited during the period. Similarly, only one questionnaire was sent per family. Based on availability and willingness to participate, 150 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 99 valid responses for analysis. Consequently, the findings of this study are derived from the statistical analysis of a total of 201 questionnaires. The analytical approach included descriptive statistics and, more specifically, factor analysis.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISTS

Descriptive analysis of the survey data reveals a nearly equal gender distribution among resort visitors, with 51% male and 49% female. The resort's clientele is predominantly middle-aged, as the largest age cohorts were 41-50 years (36%) and 31-40 years (33%), resulting in an average visitor age of 44.

The respondents were generally well-educated, with 38% having completed high school ("matric") and 36% holding a degree or diploma. In terms of family status, a significant majority (68%) were married with children, compared to 21% who were married without children. Furthermore, 36% of participants reported having children over the age of 16.

Regarding travel habits, 34% of visitors take 3-4 weekend trips annually, while 25% travel over 5-6 weekends per year. For longer vacations, 54% of respondents travel only once a year, and 40% travel 2-3 times annually. The length of stay at the resort varied, with 33% staying for 5-7 nights and 26% staying for 8-10 nights. On average, the duration of a holiday at the resort was 11.52 nights.

TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS

The objective of this section is to identify the fundamental patterns underlying the travel motivations for the resort through factor analysis. To assess the suitability of the data for Principal Component Analysis (PCA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed. The KMO measure evaluates the strength of partial correlations among variables, determining their suitability for factor analysis. For this study, the KMO value was .844, which is considered meritorious. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .0001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and thus justifying the use of data reduction via PCA. An initial set of 24 motivational items was subjected to a factor analysis using varimax rotation. This orthogonal rotation method was selected due to the low correlations observed between the resulting factors, as it simplifies the factor structure by maximizing the variance of loadings. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Component correlation matrix for motivations

Component	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.000	-.314	.104	.150	.235
2	-.314	1.000	.030	-.100	-.210
3	.104	.030	1.000	.311	.149
4	.150	-.100	.311	1.000	.307
5	.235	-.210	.149	.307	1.000

To identify the primary motivational dimensions for visiting the Ari Dolf resort, a factor analysis was conducted. The analysis used an eigenvalue of 6.438 as the factor extraction criterion and a loading threshold of .50 for item inclusion. This solution accounted for 59.850% of the total variance. The extracted factors were grouped by shared characteristics and labelled as follows: Recreational Activities (Factor 1), Rest and Relaxation (Factor 2), Personal Values (Factor 3), Social Experiences (Factor 4), and Enriching and Learning Experiences (Factor 5). The eigenvalues for these factors ranged from 1.178 to 6.438.

To assess the reliability and internal consistency of the items within each factor, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were examined. Furthermore, mean values were calculated for each factor based on the questionnaire's Likert-scale responses to determine their relative levels of importance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Factor analysis of motives for visiting the resort

Factor label	Factor 1: Recreational activities	Factor 2: Resting and relaxation	Factor 3: Personal Values	Factor 4: Social experiences	Factor 5: Enriching and Learning experiences
Entertainment	.789				
To have fun	.698				
To spend time with my family	.421				
To be part of recreational activities	.414				
To do something out of the ordinary	.285				
To break away from routine of everyday life		-.818			
To break away from everyday pressure		-.815			
To break away from everyday surroundings		-.790			
To rest		-.698			
To relax		-.611			
Influence of family			.912		
Influence of children			.829		
Influence of friends			.778		
Security			.537		
Status and prestige			.537		
To spend more time with friends				.801	
To meet new people with the same interests as mine				.642	
To learn more about my country				.571	

To satisfy my need for social interaction				.488	
Natural surroundings of the resort					.851
To see new places					.757
To visit cultural attractions					.593
To increase my quality of life					.474
Cronbach's Alpha	.715	.818	.710	.679	.751
Mean Values	2.96	3.63	1.78	2.02	2.89

Factor 1: Recreational Activities

Five items with similar characteristics were grouped into the first factor. These items encompassed entertainment, fun, family time, recreational activities, and engaging in novel experiences. This cluster was labelled "Recreational Activities," highlighting the importance for tourists to participate in diverse and enjoyable pursuits. The findings suggest that resorts should actively monitor and cater to the recreational needs of their guests.

Factor 2: Rest and Relaxation

The second factor also comprised five items, which were: breaking away from routine, escaping daily pressures, leaving one's usual environment, resting, and relaxing. This factor was termed "Rest and Relaxation." It reflects a fundamental tourist need to unwind and detach from everyday life. Consequently, resorts must cultivate a tranquil and peaceful environment that allows guests to escape their routine pressures.

Factor 3: Personal Values

The third factor identified was "Personal Values," represented by motivations such as spending time with family, children, and friends; the level of security offered by the destination; and, to a certain extent, the associated status. To cater to this, the resort should facilitate activities that enable guests to interact and spend quality time with their families.

Factor 4: Social Experiences

Comprising four items, the fourth factor was labelled "Social Experiences." These items include making new friends, meeting new people, gaining knowledge about the country, and travelling for social interaction. This indicates a tourist desire for social engagement and cultural learning. Consequently, the resort should design activities that indirectly foster guest interaction and provide educational opportunities.

Factor 5: Enriching and Learning Experiences

The final factor, "Enriching and Learning Experiences," consists of five items: the natural surroundings, discovering new places, cultural activities, improving quality of life, and excitement. This suggests that tourists are receptive to learning about their environment and culture, provided it is integrated seamlessly into the holiday experience rather than feeling like a formal lesson. While rest and relaxation remain the primary motive, resorts should also incorporate these enriching elements.

Relative Importance of Factors

As shown in Table 2, Factor 2 (Resting and Relaxation) recorded the highest mean value (3.63), confirming it as the primary motivator for visitors. Conversely, Factor 3 (Personal Values) yielded the lowest mean, suggesting that motivations like family time and security have a lesser influence on the travel decision for this demographic. These findings are critical for informing the resort's marketing strategies and product development.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Content analysis revealed that travel blogs are a significant influence in shaping perceptions of Nigeria. The findings present a dual narrative, highlighting both the country's positive attributes and its challenges.

The analysis identified four primary themes in the destination image projected by the blogs:

Rich Cultural Heritage: A prominent theme was Nigeria's vibrant culture, with frequent mentions of its diverse music, art, and traditional festivals.

Diverse Natural Attractions: Bloggers consistently documented the country's natural environment, praising its national parks, waterfalls, and scenic beaches.

Local Hospitality: The friendliness and warmth of the Nigerian people were repeatedly emphasized as a key positive aspect of the travel experience.

Infrastructural Deficiencies: A contrasting theme involved the practical difficulties of travel, with numerous accounts citing poor road conditions and underdeveloped infrastructure.

Furthermore, the study analyzed the prevailing tone and language used by the bloggers, yielding three key observations:

Predominantly Positive Portrayals: A majority of the blogs adopted an optimistic tone, actively promoting the country's attractions and the hospitality of its people.

Critical Accounts of Challenges: A subset of narratives focused on the obstacles encountered, creating a more negative and cautionary tone regarding travel logistics.

Reinforcement of Stereotypes: The analysis indicated that some bloggers employed stereotypical language, which inadvertently perpetuated existing negative imagery associated with the destination.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a dual-perspective understanding of the forces shaping domestic tourism in Nigeria. Firstly, it confirms the powerful role of travel blogs as a double-edged sword in constructing Nigeria's destination image. While these digital platforms can showcase the nation's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and renowned hospitality, they also risk reinforcing negative stereotypes by highlighting infrastructural challenges. Secondly, and more critically, the empirical research into the Ari Dolf resort reveals the core of the domestic tourist's psyche: a primary, overwhelming motivation for Rest and Relaxation.

The identification of five key motivational factors—Rest and Relaxation, Recreational Activities, Enriching and Learning Experiences, Social Experiences, and Personal Values—provides a nuanced blueprint of the modern Nigerian resort tourist, who is predominantly middle-aged, educated, and family-oriented. The clear hierarchy of these motivators, with the desire to escape and rejuvenate being paramount, demonstrates that for the domestic market, a resort serves primarily as a sanctuary from urban stress and daily pressures.

Therefore, the most successful strategy for driving domestic tourism lies in bridging the gap between the online image and the on-ground reality. Resorts must not only manage their digital reputation but must fundamentally align their service delivery and marketing with the empirically proven need for tranquility and escape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the synthesized findings of this study, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

1. For Resort Managers & Operators:
    Product Development: Prioritize and enhance the "rest and relaxation" experience. This includes investing in superior spa facilities, creating quiet zones, ensuring serene pool areas, and training staff in discreet, non-intrusive service.
    Strategic Service Bundling: Design packaged experiences that bundle the primary motivator (relaxation) with secondary ones. For example, offer a "Rejuvenation Package" that includes a spa treatment (Factor 2), a curated cultural performance (Factor 5), and access to family-friendly recreational activities (Factor 1).
    Targeted Communication: Reframe all marketing communications to directly appeal to the need for escape. Use messaging that emphasizes "tranquility," "getaway," "recharge," and "serenity," visually showcasing the resort as a peaceful haven.

2. For Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and Tourism Boards:

Collaborative Blogger Campaigns: Move beyond passive observation to active collaboration. Partner with credible travel bloggers on campaigns that strategically showcase Nigerian resorts as idyllic retreats. Provide them with authentic experiences that highlight relaxation and unique recreational activities, encouraging them to tell a more balanced and appealing story.

Infrastructure Advocacy: Use the findings on infrastructural deficiencies from the blog analysis as empirical evidence to lobby government bodies for targeted investment in roads and public utilities around key tourist resorts, thereby directly addressing a major deterrent for potential visitors.

3. For Tourism Policymakers:

Develop a Domestic Tourism Charter: Formulate policies and incentives that encourage the development of resort facilities catering specifically to the relaxation and family-oriented needs of the domestic market. This could include tax breaks for resorts that develop world-class wellness and family recreation centers.

Support for Digital Storytelling: Fund training programs for local content creators and resort marketers to develop skills in creating compelling, professional online content that accurately and positively reflects the Nigerian resort experience.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a powerful synergy: an online destination image that accurately promises a restorative escape, and a physical resort experience that delivers on that promise, thereby unlocking the significant potential of Nigeria's domestic tourism market.

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