

Marketing Communication Practices and Its Effectiveness in Selected Ecotourism Destinations of Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Understanding the role that the various marketing communication sources play (how they are perceived, whether they are used and whether their use influences the likelihood of the destination being chosen or not) during the tourist destination decision-making process is important to professionals engaged in the marketing of tourist destinations. The study seeks to explore the marketing communication practices employed by selected ecotourism destinations in Southwest, Nigeria and how they are perceived to be effective. The study population consists of ecotourism destinations' management. Data were collected through questionnaire administration and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Findings revealed statistically significant differences in marketing communication practices employed by the destinations and perceived effectiveness of communication strategies employed by destinations.

Keywords: Marketing, communication, effectiveness, destination, ecotourism, southwest

Introduction

Tourism in Nigeria is favoured by the large size of the country which cuts through several ecological zones and the presence of several tourist attractions. (Odeleye and Oyekanmi, 2013).

Nigeria has a lot to offer in terms of its rich biodiversity and extensive ecosystem and can actually tap into this economy-boosting venture, like its other African counterparts such as South Africa, Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia, among others, who inarguably enrich their economy through wildlife and nature-based tourism.

Ecotourism, according to Fennel (2003) is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally-oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas. The International Ecotourism Society based in the U.S. adopts "responsible travel that conserves natural environments and

sustains the well-being of local people" as the definition for ecotourism (TIES, 2010).

The interest of choosing tourism as a "product to sell" is that the tourism industry is one of the world's major sectors of economic development and growth; it contributes a lot to the diversification of the economy by generating income, reducing the gap between rural and urban populations and by improving basic services (MacPherson, 1997; Narayanan, 2002).

Increasing competitive tourism market has made the product's marketing a very important factor in order to gain better destination patronage and to attract more consumption of services and generate repeat businesses and loyalty (Yuju-Wang, 2007). Traditionally, marketing has centered around the notion of profit-oriented buyer-seller relationships based on exchange transactions between a producer or service provider and a purchaser or client. Marketing is an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (American Marketing Association, 2008).

Ecotourism as part of destination marketing is an aspect of the communication of eco-friendly tourism activities or services given its ability to position a destination and strengthen its competitive advantage. To enhance the tourism experience of the visitor, there is a need for effective communication which should result in possible cooperation of stakeholders in favour of destination and marketing processes (Özdemir and Adan, 2015).

In seeking to understand the effectiveness of marketing communications, researchers have traditionally relied on measures of awareness, recall, and recognition (Beerli and Santana, 1999). Many researchers, through their theoretical and empirical contributions, describe the impact of marketing communications on organisation performance, particularly to improve relations between the organisation and its public, for example, its customers (McGoon, 1998; Low, 2000,). Explanation of this relation can be found in the degree of marketing communication effectiveness and its impact on overall organisational performance (Kitchen and Schultz, 2009, 201; Young and Aitken, 2007). Responsible and effective marketing and promotional efforts can only be achieved through effective marketing tools for influencing visitor use levels, types of visitors, their expectations, behaviour level of preparation, choice of experience and ultimate satisfaction. Primary marketing communication elements include: traditional mass media advertising (TV, magazines etc.), direct response and interactive advertising (direct mail, telephone solicitation), place advertising (billboards, posters), store signage and point-of-purchase advertising (in-

store shelf signs, shopping cart ads), trade- and consumer-oriented promotions (trade shows, samples, coupons), event marketing and sponsorships (sponsorship of arts, fairs, and festivals), marketing oriented public relations and publicity and personal selling, (Shimp 2010).

Although, tourism marketing studies have addressed some of the marketing communications issues bothering on destination publicity (Dore and Crouch, 2003), destination branding (Morgan *et al.*, 2002, 2003), advertising effectiveness (Kim *et al.*, 2005), and destination image (Bonn *et al.*, 2005; Govers *et al.*, 2007; McCartney *et al.*, 2008). Absent in the literature is the significance of the level at which potential visitor perceived the marketing communication employed by destinations to be effective in their pre-visit decision making is a matter of concern. It has been argued that marketing and communication is to inform, persuade, encourage, or more specifically, to influence the potential customer or trade intermediaries (travel agents, tour operators, reservation services, hotel and charter broker) through communications, to think and act in a certain manner, (Bhaita 2006), However, the issue of effectiveness in the variety of ways in which marketing communication are undertaken have not been adequately considered in the study areas. Also, individual destinations have not fully developed and project a unique and recognisable brand. It has been observed by Opperman (1999) that the success of individual destinations depends on their ability to develop and project a unique and recognisable brand, which is one of the most critical developments in marketing in the 20th century. Marketing strategies and marketing communication tools require intermittent evaluation to determine their level of influence on tourists' decision to choose a specific destination for a visit. In addition to these challenges, there is a growing need for potential visitors to understand the various communication strategies better and differentiate the destination and its product offerings from competing destinations. These marketing strategies and marketing communication tools, according to Ajake (2015) requires intermittent evaluation to determine their level of influence on tourists' decision to choose a specific destination for visit. It is at this background that this study seeks to consider the significance of marketing communication effectiveness in terms of creating informative, flawless and consistent messages through the channels of communication capable of motivating intending visitors. Thus, this study is important because of the need for the development of effective marketing communication strategies aimed at improving the relationship among tourism stakeholder and facilitate ecotourism development. The study hypothesized a no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by the destinations.

The Study Area

The study was conducted at Okomu National Park, Edo State, Lekki Conservation Centre, Lagos State; Idanre Hills, Ondo State; Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort, Ekiti State and Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, Osun State respectively.

Okomu national park (ONP) is located in Ovia South-west local government in Edo State, Nigeria. It lies on latitude 6°21' N and longitude 50°13' E. The park covers a land area of 212km² (National Park Service, 2009). It is drained by the Osse River which defines its eastern boundary BirdLife International. (2010). Rainfall is between 1,524 and 2,540 mm per year. Soils are acidic, nutrient-poor sandy loam *Ejidike and Okosodo (2007)*. Vegetation in Okomu National Park is Guinea–Congo lowland rain forest, including areas of swamp-forest, high forest, secondary forest, and open scrub. The park has diverse fauna, with 33 species of mammals including the African buffalo and the endangered African forest elephant.

Lekki Conservation Centre (LCC) is a Natural Resource Conservation located in Lekki, Lagos State, Nigeria. Its geographical coordinates are 6°25'6.4417° N, 3.5355° E. It covers a landmass of 78 hectares located in Lekki Peninsula. LCC consists of swamp and savannah habitats. Lagos experiences a tropical savanna climate (Aw) according to the Köppen climate classification. The wettest month is June with precipitation total 315.5 millimetres (12.42 in), while the driest month is January with precipitation total 13.2 millimetres (0.52 in). LCC is typically a nature reserve and traverses a mosaic of vegetation types which include secondary forest, swamp forest and Savanna grassland. The endangered species of animals include bushbucks, crocodiles, mona monkeys, squirrels, snakes, monitor lizards, duikers, giant rats and an impressive variety of birds.

Idanre Hills is located in Idanre, Idanre Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Idanre falls on latitude 9°8'N of the equator and Longitude 5°5'E of the Greenwich meridian with a terrain that stands at the height of 286 - 500m. Idanre's climate is classified as tropical. Annual mean rainfall is between 1400 – 2000 mm. The temperature is fairly moderate and ranges between 21oC and 30 o C depending on the time of the year. Arowosafe and Omopariola (2016). Idanre Hills. Idanre hills are endowed with indigenous mammals, such as the tailless Hyrax, still populate the rocks. A species of unclassified monkey inhabits the forests around Orosun. There are many different species of bat. The flora is mainly lowland tropical but at the highest altitudes (above 760 m.) a few species are present which can be regarded as montane.

Ikogosi warm spring is located in Ikogosi a small town in Ekiti West Local Government area of Ekiti State, Ikogosi warm spring lies about 2km

west of Ikogosi town on longitude $4^{\circ} 56.46'E$ and latitude $7^{\circ} 36.88'N$. From the surrounding hills rises the warm spring. The spring is a low enthalpy system, its temperature being around $36^{\circ}C$. The area covered by the attraction is about 31.38 hectares and is protected from erosion by tall evergreen trees, forming a canopy under which visitors can relax. Ikogosi Warm Spring has a variety of animal species characterizing the thick forest nature such as antelope, monkey, reptiles and others such favourable natural habitat. The vegetation of this resort centre is a highly thick forest.

The Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove is located on the outskirts of Osogbo. Geographically, Osogbo is situated on Latitude $7^{\circ}46' 0''$ North and Longitude $4^{\circ} 34' 0''$ East. By road, Osogbo is 88 km South of Ilorin and 511 km Northwest of Akure. It covers an area of 75 hectares and is regarded as the abode of the Yoruba goddess of fertility, Osun. Osogbo is situated over 500 m above sea-level with an annual rainfall of about 0.6 m lying mainly in the deciduous forest. The town's climate is less humid with strong effect of harmattan winds during the dry season. Osun Osogbo grove is known to house the endangered White-throated monkey, *Cercopithecus erythrogaster* and threatened tree species like *Azelia africana*, *Entandrophragma candoleii*, *Guarea cedrata*, *M. excelsa*, *Pseudospondias macrocarpa*, etc.

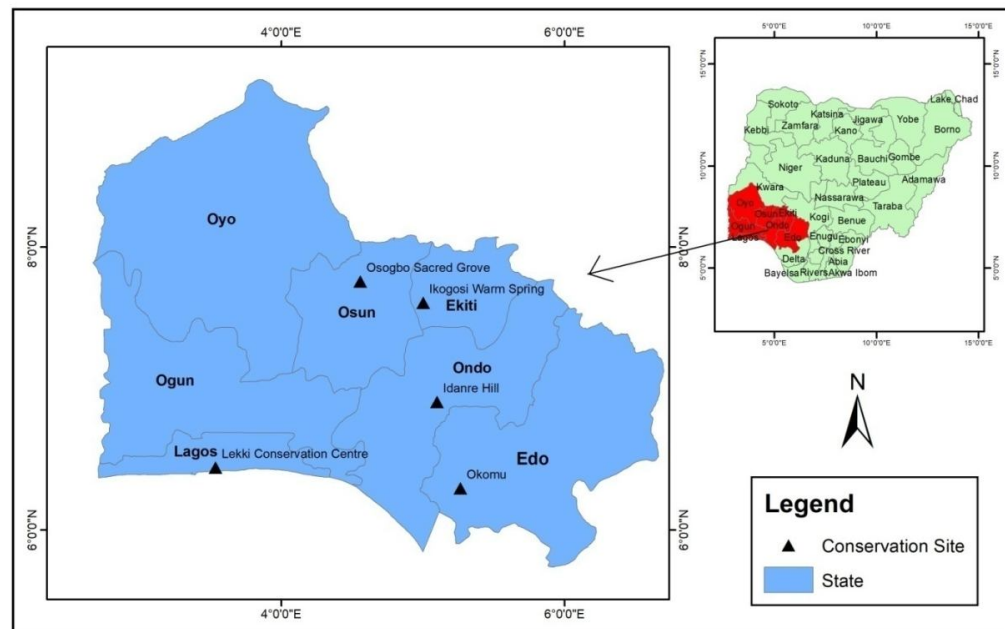


Figure: 1: Map of Southwest Nigeria.

Source: Authors' Field Work, (2018)

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted in the Okomu National Park, Lekki Conservation Centre, Idanre Hills, Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort and Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove as the five selected ecotourism destinations in Southwest, Nigeria which constituted the study population. The instruments for data collection was structured questionnaire consisting of necessary information of the study sites which includes the name of the attraction, the location, hours of operation, website, seasonality and special designation. The questions regarded the identification of the marketing communication practices employed by destinations and the rating of their perceived effectiveness from "highly effective" to "ineffective" was applied. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in the perceived effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by destinations

Data on the communication strategies employed by selected destinations were subjected to descriptive statistics to identify the marketing communication practices employed by destinations and the level of effectiveness of the communication practices as perceived in the study locations. In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential statistics of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to identify significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by destinations.

Results

Typical Marketing Communication Practices Employed by Ecotourism Destinations

Table 1 shows the typical marketing communication practices employed by eco destinations. It reveals that among the 22 communication channels used for the study, television, newspaper, brochures, tour operators and tourism agencies had the highest use (100%) respectively. Hotels, travel agents, TripAdvisor, facebook and travel agent and WhatsApp (40%) and Wikitravel and printed travel guides (20%) respectively.

Table 1: Typical Marketing Communication Practices Employed by Ecotourism Destinations

| Marketing comm. Practices | ONP | Lekki | Idanre hill | Ikogosi | Osun | % used |
|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------------|---------|------|--------|
| Broadcast media (TV) | + | + | + | + | + | 100% |
| Broadcast media (Radio) | - | + | + | - | + | 60% |
| Print media (Newspaper) | + | + | + | + | + | 100 |
| Print media (magazine) | + | + | + | - | + | 80% |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| Brochures | + | + | + | + | + | 100% |
| Friends and relatives | - | + | + | + | - | 60% |
| Direct comm...(airline) | - | - | + | - | + | 60% |
| Direct comm. (hotel) | - | - | + | - | + | 40% |
| Direct comm. (tour oper.) | + | + | + | + | + | 100% |
| Direct comm. (tour. agency) | + | + | + | + | + | 100% |
| Direct comm. (attraction.) | - | + | + | + | + | 80% |
| Travel guides online. | - | + | + | - | + | 60% |
| Ind. Trav. review sites and forums | + | + | + | - | + | 80% |
| Local tourism board | + | - | + | + | + | 80% |
| Travel agents | + | + | - | - | - | 40% |
| Trip advisor, wikitravel | + | + | - | - | - | 40% |
| Facebook | - | - | - | + | - | 20% |
| Instagram | - | + | - | + | + | 40% |
| Whatsapp | - | - | - | + | + | 40% |
| Printed travel guides | + | - | - | - | - | 20% |
| Skype | - | - | - | - | - | 0% |

Key (+ Used, - Not used)

Source: Field Survey, 2018Source: Field Survey, 2018

Differences in Marketing Communication Practices Employed by Destinations

Table 2 presents the result of the differences in marketing communication practices employed by the destinations. It shows that there is a statistically significant difference in marketing communication practices employed by the destinations ($p \leq 0.01$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2: Differences in marketing communication practices employed by the selected destinations

| Communication Practices | F value | P=value) | Decision |
|-------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Tv | 2.90 | 0.000 | S |
| Radio | 6.80 | 0.000 | S |
| Newspaper | 6.90 | 0.000 | S |
| Magazine | 6.98 | 0.000. | S |
| Brochures | 2.09 | 0.000. | S |
| Friends And Relatives | 2.08 | .0000 | S |
| Airline | 3.08 | .0000 | S |
| Hotel | 6.08 | .0000 | S |
| Tour Operator | 12.60 | 0.000 | S |
| Tourism Agency | 12.40 | .0000 | S |
| Attraction | 3.086 | 0.000 | S |

| | | | |
|---|-------|-------|---|
| Travel Guides Online | 7.086 | 0.000 | S |
| Independent Traveller Review Sites And Forums | 8.60 | 0.000 | S |
| Local Tourism Board | 8.600 | 0.000 | S |
| Travel Agents | 3.086 | 0.000 | S |
| Trip Advisor | 5.086 | 0.000 | S |
| Wikitravel | 3.600 | .0000 | S |
| Facebook | 12.40 | .0021 | S |
| Whatsapp | 8.400 | 0.000 | S |
| Printed Travel Guide | 7.800 | 0.000 | S |

Source: Field Survey, 2018

S=Significant

Perceived Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Practices Employed by Destinations

Perceived effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by selected ecotourism destinations is presented in Table 3. The study revealed that (TV) is perceived to be the most effective marketing communication practices employed by selected ecotourism destinations with a mean of 4.40. Following closely are magazine and brochure with a mean of 4.20 respectively. Other marketing communication practices that are perceived to be effective include newspaper (mean=3.80), Independent traveller review sites and forums (mean=3.60), local tourism board (mean=3.60), and friends and relatives (mean=3.00), Findings further revealed that other communication practices presented in the study are less effective while Skype is found not to be applicable with a mean score of 1.00.

Table 3: Perceived effectiveness of marketing communication practices employed by destinations in meeting desired communication objectives

| Marketing communication practices | Mean | SD |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|
| Broadcast media (TV) | 4.40 | 0.54 |
| Broadcast media (Radio) | 3.20 | 1.48 |
| Print media (Newspaper,) | 3.80 | 0.83 |
| Print media (magazine) | 4.20 | 0.83 |
| Bronchures | 4.20 | 0.44 |
| Friends and relatives | 3.00 | 1.87 |
| Direct communication (airline) | 2.00 | 1.41 |
| Direct communication (hotel) | 2.20 | 1.64 |
| Direct communication (tour operator) | 3.20 | 1.30 |
| Direct communication (tourism agency) | 2.60 | 1.51 |

| | | |
|--|------|------|
| Direct communication (attraction.) | 2.00 | 1.41 |
| Travel guides online. | 2.60 | 1.51 |
| Independent traveller review sites and forums. | 3.60 | 1.51 |
| Local tourism board | 3.60 | 1.67 |
| Travel agents | 2.00 | 1.41 |
| Trip advisor | 2.20 | 1.78 |
| Wikitravel | 1.60 | 1.34 |
| Facebook | 2.20 | 1.64 |
| Instagram | 2.20 | 1.64 |
| Whatsapp | 2.00 | 1.41 |
| Printed travel guides | 1.80 | 1.78 |
| Skype | 1.00 | 0.00 |

Rated as highly effective, effective, neutral, ineffective, highly ineffective

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Difference in Perceived Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Strategies Employed by the Destinations.

The difference in perceived effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by the destinations was found to be significant. ($p = 0.00$) is less than 0.05. Precisely, the result reveals that selected ecotourism destinations have different perceptions on the effectiveness of communication strategies in their organizations. Effective marketing communication according to (Debski 2013) is an element of building a competitiveness of destinations. The result which demonstrated that a strategy of marketing communication should be in line with the vision, and mission of the organization and in line with the chosen market strategy (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). The findings also prove that individual destinations depend on their ability to develop and project a unique and recognizable brand, as suggested by (Opperman, 1999). This suggests that in targeting visitor segment; therefore, ecotourism destination can use many suitable tools as their communication mix for effectiveness. Thus, an implication that selected ecotourism destinations has different perceptions on the effectiveness of communication strategies in their organizations.

Table 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Strategies Employed by Destinations

| Perceived Effectiveness | F value | P value | Decision |
|---|---------|---------|----------|
| Tv | 5.200 | 0.003 | S |
| Radio | 2.520 | 0.000 | S |
| Newspaper | 7.400 | 0.000 | S |
| Brochures | 8.600 | 0.002 | S |
| Friends and relatives | 10.120 | 0.000 | S |
| Airline | 3.000 | 0.000 | S |
| Hotel | 11.400 | 0.000 | S |
| Tour operator | 8.360 | 0.000 | S |
| Tourism agency | 6.415 | 0.000 | S |
| Attraction | 7.778 | 0.002 | S |
| Travel guides online | 6.89. | 0.000. | S |
| Independent traveller review sites and forums | 7.150 | 0.003 | S |
| Local tourism board | 4.600 | 0.002 | S |
| Travel agents | 8.231 | 0.003 | S |
| Trip advisor | 9.280 | .001 | S |
| Wikitravel | 9.600 | 0.000 | S |
| Facebook | 9.200 | 0.002 | S |
| Instagram | 8.200 | 0.000 | S |
| Whatsapp | 5.231 | 0.001 | S |
| Printed travel guides | 8.600 | 0.000 | S |
| Skype | 7.897. | 0.000. | S |

Source: Field Survey, 2018

S=Significant

Conclusion

The paper is aimed at exploring the communication practices employed by selected ecotourism destinations in Southwest, Nigeria and how effective they are perceived to be. It is found that marketing communication practices were employed differently according to the unique characteristics of the destinations. Also, findings further revealed that differences in the perceived effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by destinations were found to be significant. Thus, selected ecotourism destinations have different perceptions on the effectiveness of communication strategies in their organizations. Understanding the observed differences could allow the destinations to adopt suitable communication practices that could influence the likelihood of the destination being chosen during the tourist decision making the process. The findings could also enable management of ecotourism attractions to improve on their communication channels to increase efficiency in terms of marketing of resources and information accessibility to fulfil the needs of

ecotourist and their satisfaction. Further research in these areas is essential to professionals engaged in the marketing of tourist destinations and in particular in ecotourism market in the southwest, Nigeria with a lot to offer in terms of its rich biodiversity and extensive ecosystem.

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