

# THE INFLUENCE OF TOURISTS' RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS ON THE PERCEIVED TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE OF JOS PLATEAU

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## Abstract

*Assessing the factors that influence the perceived tourism destination image of a place is an important marketing research tool for planning, developing and promoting the tourism industry. This study focused on how the religious faiths of tourists influence the perceived tourism destination image of Jos Plateau and suggested measures that can improve and sustain a positive tourism image for the region. The objective of the study is to determine the relationship between religious faith of tourist and the perceived tourism destination image of the Jos Plateau. The study was undertaken at Jos National Museum in which 310 tourists were sampled using a non-proportional quota sampling technique. The study found that Christians were more predisposed to perceiving Jos Plateau with a positive tourism destination image than Muslims, especially during and after each cycle of violent communal conflict that has ravaged the State since 2001. The reason is that Jos is a Christian-dominated state. The communal conflicts received religious colouration and thus pitched the majority Christian group in the region against the minority Islamic group. The religious divide that mostly brewed the conflicts thus influenced the perceived tourism destination image of the state as confirmed by the chi-square inferential statistical test used. To now achieve a good, attractive and sustainable tourism destination image of Jos Plateau the researchers recommended religious, political and ethnic tolerance and understanding in the state as well as provision of adequate security for sustainable peace enthronement and truthful and objective news reportage about incidences in Jos Plateau.*

**Keywords:** Influence, Religion, Perception, Destination, Image.

## Introduction

Tourism destination image has been defined as an individual's overall perception or total set of impressions of a place or as the mental portrayal of a destination. The image of a destination consists of the subjective interpretation of reality made by the tourist. The image formed of a destination, therefore, exercises some influence over tourists' behaviours, especially in their decision-making about destination choice. The series of impressions or perceptions of a tourist destination by visitors can be referred to as its image (Wang, 2016).

The destination is said to be the product visited by tourists and could be recommended to others to visit (Yoon and Uysal, 2005, as cited in Wang and Leou, 2015), while perceived value is defined as the overall evaluation made by consumers through weighing their giving and gaining with regard to the product's image, and also an important indication for the encouragement to repeat visits (Zeithaml, 1988, as cited in Wang and Leou, 2015; Jang and Feng, 2007 as cited in Wang and Leou, 2015; Stylos., 2016 as

cited in Wang et al., 2017; Wang, 2017) . Controllable attributes which influence the value customers achieved from a visit to a destination are said to be price, destination product, promotion and place, while the uncontrollable ones are destination characteristics which include security and political instability of the place (Govers, 2007; Aliman, 2016), hence value has a very strong and significant effect on destination competitiveness (Cronin, 2000; Ulaga, 2001; McDougall and Leresque, 2000 as cited in Wang, 2017).

Visiting a destination by tourists is usually a function of her attractiveness and positive image. The attractions of a destination and the good image formed about the destination are thus the factors that could exert a pull on the tourists. The attractiveness of a destination in addition to the general peace, hospitality, tranquillity, serenity and calmness experienced at the destination constitute the image of that destination. This image is very crucial to the growth and sustainable development of the tourism industry of any destination. Undoubtedly, this is the reason why any destination that has rich and/ or unique natural and/ or cultural attractions must be peaceful, accommodating and free from all odds that can negatively affect its tourism destination image. No matter how spectacular and unique the attractions of a destination are, if it is frequently faced with conflicts, wars, riots, political instability and a high rate of economic and social crimes, the destination will surely have a negative image and be shunned.

Consequently, tourists will not come to such an unpeaceful destination because the destination has a bad (negative) image. Invariably, the attractiveness of a destination must therefore be inclusive of its peaceful atmosphere. This is why for a tourist destination that wants to develop and boom, the issue of peace cannot be underscored or compromised. However, Tourist travel decisions and behaviour are influenced by a destination's image which in turn is influenced by tourist experience and value realized by a visit (Jenkins, 1999; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Naidoo, 2010). Tourist satisfaction is a consequence of perceived value while perceived value influences the image of a destination (Milfener, 2011; Woodruff, 1997). Destination image can be assessed in five dimensions which are quality of experience, touristic attractiveness, peaceful environment and infrastructure, entertainment/outdoor activities and cultural traditions (Qu, 2011 as cited in Artuger, 2013).

## **Objectives**

The aim of this study is to investigate how religious faith of tourist affect the tourism destination image of the Jos Plateau depending on which faith dominate at the destination. The specific objective is:

To determine the relationship between religious faith of tourist and the perceived tourism destination image of the Jos plateau.

### **Concept of Destination Image**

The importance of the tourist destination's image is universally acknowledged since it affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice (Gallarza, Gil, & Calderon, 2002). Also, the destination image is multidimensional and comprises both symbolic and tangible features (Mackay and Fesenmaier, 2000).

Most recent research studies on tourism marketing (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Moutinho, 1987; Vela, 2009) refer to an image as a concept formed through the consumer's rational and emotional interpretation, the two of which are closely intertwined.

Cognitive evaluations refer to the perceptions, beliefs, and knowledgeable individuals have of an object. In this case, such evaluations have to do with the cognitive or perceptive component of the tourism destination image, an image created based on a set of attributes which would correspond to the resources, attractions, or general tourism offered at the destination (Stabler, 1995; Vale, 2009).

Alhemoud and Armstrong's (1996) classification explains what is meant by tourism offers. These authors classify tourist attractions into four categories:

- natural attractions (e.g., forests, rivers);
- historic attractions (ruins, castles, and other ancient architecture that offers a glimpse into the past);
- cultural attractions (religious attractions, museums, modern architecture, fairs, festivals, handicrafts);
- artificial attractions (e.g., theme parks).

The image concept has generally been considered an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impressions about an object or destination (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). Researchers in several disciplines and fields agree that the image construct has both perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations. The perceptual/cognitive evaluations refer to the beliefs or knowledge about a destination's attributes whereas affective evaluation refers to feelings toward, or attachment to it. A common agreement is that this depends on a cognitive evaluation of objects and the affective responses are formed as a function of these cognitive responses. An overall image of a place is formed as a result of both perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations of that place (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

Jos Plateau is a land of very beautiful and unique natural sceneries, rich and colourful cultural and historical heritage, clement weather as well as very hospitable and peace-loving inhabitants. The state is therefore frequently referred to as a "tourist haven", "the land of beauty", "the temperate region", "a miniature Nigeria", "a home of unity in diversity" and above all a "home of peace and tourism" among other sobriquets that describe her attractiveness.

Jos Plateau is therefore seen as a tourist delight and both the public and private bodies have been making efforts to boost and sustain the tourism industry of the region through various investments. The investments mainly focus on the provision of both infrastructural and superstructure facilities. Efforts are also made to promote the tourism industry of the region through different promotion strategies such as advertisements, announcements, news, jingles, brochures, throwaways and billboards all aimed at projecting a very positive and attractive image of the state to lure tourists and investors.

But while the state was making frantic efforts to project itself as a highly cherished tourist destination with a very positive and alluring destination image, communal conflict broke out on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001. The conflict received religious colouration with the dividing line drawn between the two main religions in the state: Christianity and Islam. Commonly, the “war songs” have been sung to reflect and pitch the followers of the two religions against each other. Consequently, the cycles of the communal crises witnessed have deeply cracked the state along religious divides; thus, sowing the seeds of discord, hatred, xenophobia and segregation between the adherents of the two main religions (Christianity and Islam). The factor of religion is therefore expected to bear strongly on the perceived tourism destination image of Jos Plateau. Hence, specifically, the focus of the research was to establish the nature of major communal conflicts that occurred in the Jos Plateau since the first eruption in 2001, enumerate the major cycles of the communal conflicts and then determine how religion has influenced the perceived tourism destination image of Jos Plateau by tourists before, during and after the cycles of the bloody communal conflicts that tore the region apart.

Therefore, a wide range of other factors can influence the perceived tourism destination image of places. This study, however, singled out the factor of religion as one of the main factors that induced the seemingly incessant communal conflicts in the Jos Plateau. The same factor could influence the perceived tourism destination image of the region.

### **Research Hypothesis**

A research hypothesis was postulated on the perceived tourism destination image of Plateau State as follows:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Tourists’ religious affiliations do not significantly influence the perceived tourism destination image of Jos Plateau.

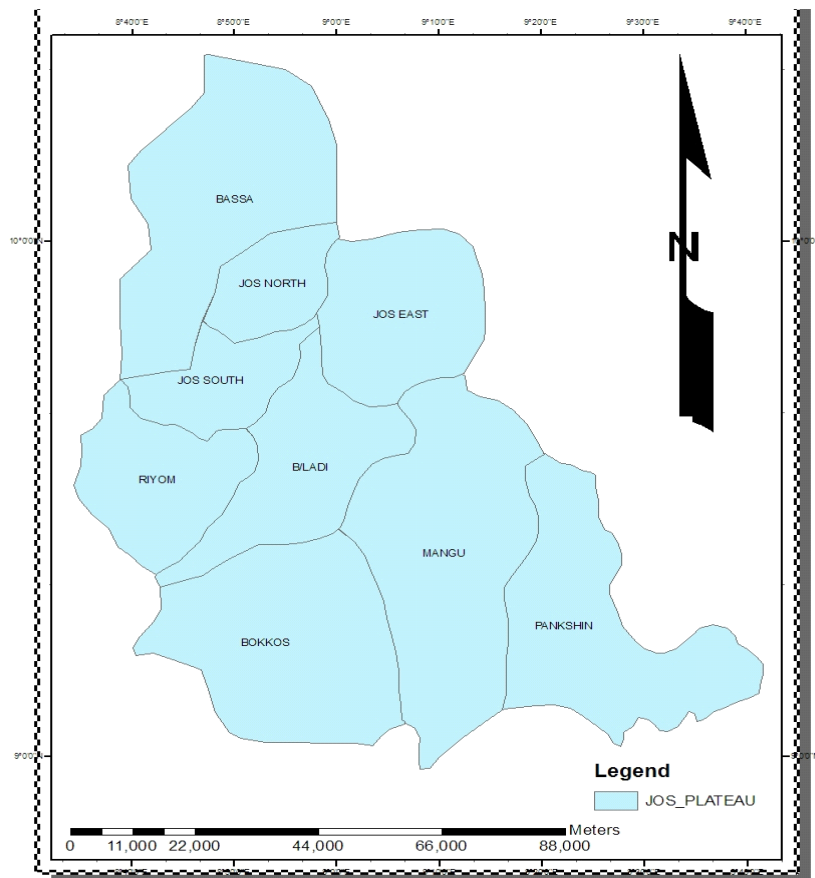
### **The Study Area**

The Jos-Plateau zone has a total area landmass of about 9,400 sq. km with an average rise of about 1250 meters above mean sea level. The highest peak on the Jos Plateau attains an elevation of 1829 meters above sea level around the Shere Hills. (Plateau State Government 2019).

The Jos Plateau is a plateau located near the centre of Nigeria. It is bounded by 300-600-meter escarpments around much of its circumference.

The plateau has given its name to the State, Plateau State in which it is found and is itself named for the state's capital, Jos. Jos - Plateau region is located in the middle belt zone of Nigeria and lies between latitudes 9°03' North and 10°03' North and longitudes 7°03' East and 8°03' East (Plateau State Government 2019). The Jos-plateau region shares common boundaries with Bauchi State in the North, Kanke LGA in the East, Nasarawa State in the South and Kaduna State in the West. The Jos plateau region covers 9 LGAs to include Basa, Jos North, Jos East, Jos South, Barkin-Ladi, Riyom, Bokkos, Mangu and Pankshin LGAs. (Plateau State Tourism Corporation 2015).

Jos Plateau is a land of beautiful sceneries, rich cultural and historical heritage and excellent weather. The people of the region are very hospitable and accommodating. These explain why Jos Plateau has come to be identified as the "Home of Peace and Tourism. The list of tourist attractions is endless.



**Figure 1:** The Jos-Plateau Region showing Nine LGAs covering about 9,400km<sup>2</sup>.

**Source:** Bureau for Land, Survey and Town Planning Jos, Plateau State (2018)

## **Literature Review**

The formation of a destination image is influenced not only by the information obtained from different sources but also by the characteristics of the individuals including the individual's own needs, motivations, prior knowledge, preferences and other personal characteristics. In that way, the individuals build their mental picture of the tourist destination (Asworth and Voogd, 1990; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Gartner, 1993). Image is probably the most important concept for interpreting the destination choices made by tourists even if it is difficult for tourists to gain a clear image of a destination without having visited it before (Govers and Go, 2003). very often the responses of the tourism industry to crisis of any nature is predictable; usually resulting in a sudden reduction in the numbers of tourists and deepening economic fortunes of the host region or tourist destination. (Gonap and Gontul 2020) For example, Mwathe (2011) reported that the political crisis in Egypt, which engulfed the nation in 2011, occurred at the peak of in-bound tourist flow. Already the impact is seriously felt in a massive reduction in tourist visits to historical sites in Luxor, Aswan and Cairo coupled with the cancellation of hotel reservations and bookings, (Gonap and Gontul 2020).

The personal factors that influence personal perceived images are the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals (gender, age, level of education, family life cycle, social class, place of residence/origin, religion and ethnicity) as well as those of a psychological nature (motivations, values and personality of life cycle) (Beerli and Martin 2004).

When Walmsley and Jenkins (1993) studied the perceived image of different tourist resorts in Australia, they found that the image of places differs depending on the visitor's gender and age. On the other hand, the study carried out by Baloglu (1997) which analyzed the image of the USA among German tourists found no statistically significant relationships between the perceived image and the demographic variables of gender, income and education. However, the tourists' marital status, age and occupation influenced the perceived image moderately. In a later work, Baloglu and McCleary (1990a) found that an individual's age and level of education influenced the perceived image of various tourist destinations. Stern and Krakover (1993) analyzed the influence that the level of education had on perceived images of a city and found significant differences depending on the individual's level of education. Mackay and Fesenmaier (1997) analyzed how the visual content of tourist advertising material affected the formation of an image and reached the conclusion that an individual's age and marital status do not affect the perceived image. However, they did find statistically significant differences linked to the individual's gender and level of income. Chen and Kerstetter (1999), in a study of the image of Pennsylvania as a rural tourist destination, concluded that the tourists' gender and family status significantly influenced the perceived image.

Furthermore, several researchers have found that socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education, occupation, household status

(Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and place of origin, distance, income, social class (Beerli & Martin, 2004a; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Zhang, Lu and Zhang, 2006) all affect individuals' image formation to different extents. The study carried out by Tasci (2007) demonstrated that age, race, and previous experience and important factors for image perception (San Martín & Rodriguez, 2008).

From the foregoing review, a gap exists that religion may not have been considered an important factor in destination choices in many locations because hardly had any research work examined its influence on image perception. This is one of the gaps that this study seeks to address. Indeed, religion may play an important role in people's perception of tourist destinations, especially in a setting like Nigeria with a history of religious conflicts, fanaticism and antagonism. The dominant religion practiced at a particular tourist destination could affect the perception of the faithful of other religions that may be dominant in other locations. This is especially so in situations, like in Nigeria and Plateau State where ethno-religious crises have polarized the national polity and created perceptions of insecurity for adherents of religious minorities in different parts of the country.

Tsai et al (2009) opined that a destination may be considered competitive if it can attract and satisfy potential tourists and also influence tourism-related businesses. That is also the case if, as in the view of Dwyer & Kim (2003), a destination can deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations with regards to those aspects of experience considered as important by tourists. The model proposed by Ritchie & Crouch (2000, 2003) is the most well-known conceptual model of destination competitiveness in tourism literature. Their framework is based on the theoretical concepts of effective use of resources. Many researchers have used this model as the starting point for their research on destination competitiveness.

The model distinguishes 36 attributes of competitiveness classified into five key factors. Dwyer & Kim (2003) translated the model of Ritchie & Crouch (2000) into specific indicators which identified new key factors as demand conditions (destination awareness; destination perception and destination preferences) and situational conditions (competitive micro-environment; destination location; global micro-environment; price competitiveness; safety and security) that work together to determine destination competitiveness. Porter, (1990) and Enderwick (1990) considered a number of broad factors such as human resources, physical resources, knowledge resources, capital resources, infrastructure, and historical and cultural resources that all serve to determine destination competitiveness. They argued further that it is important to also understand the relationship and interplay between the factors that make determine competitiveness. However, none of these models deals directly with the issue of destination competitiveness in heritage tourism.

Many of the attributes used in measuring destination images such as attractions, accessibility, accommodation, amenities, local community, shopping options, natural landscapes, service equipment, recreational equipment, cultural attractions, natural environment, historical treasures, price or value, and a variety of events and experiences and motivation have variously been exhausted by many researchers (Steinberg, 1996; Pearce 2005; Romera, 2005; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi and Qu, 2008; Aziz, 2009; Prayag, 2009; Lee 2009; Majid et al. 2010; Eusebio and Vieira 2011; Prayag and Ryan 2011; Coban, 2012; Prayag and Ryan 2012; Vipat and Bharucha, 2014; Lo et al., 2014; Prada-Trigo et al., 2016; Salim and Mwaipopo 2016).

Variables that measured the value of money spent by tourists at a heritage site also include their satisfaction with entertainment and events such as the experience of a new culture, romance with nature, escape relaxation, relationship enhancement, self-actualization, festivals and cultural shows for entertainment, environment cleanliness, climate conduciveness, food and beverages, security and safety and spiritual attributes such as emotional healing and protection (Poria et al. 2004; Pearce 2005; Salim and Mwaipopo 2016; Chand 2013; Vipat and Bharucha 2014; Fisichelli et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2016; Alvarado-Sizzo et al., 2017). Destination image has a direct impact on satisfaction which consequently impacts tourists' future behaviour either revisit the destination or speak positively about it or not (Lee 2009; Prayag 2009).

This theory assumes that apart from attractions already situated in the grove, satisfaction with destination common services and entertainment and events can all be used in creating a positive image for attracting customers (destination selection) to visit the Plateau State, but due to the religious crises in Plateau State it has created a negative perception on the mind of a tourist.

## **Methodology**

First, the researchers sought and obtained information on the nature of major cycles of communal conflicts that have occurred in Plateau State from the state's Ministry of Information. The researchers then purposely selected the Jos National Museum one of the regularly patronized tourist resorts in the state to interact with the tourists found on site. The study population thus comprised all the domestic tourists that visit Jos National Museum at the time of the study. Tourists, who were residents of Plateau State, were however deliberately excluded to avoid bias in the tourism image appraisal of the state. Also, international tourists and those that were below the age of 18 years were excluded from the study population. Very few were seen at the site.

However, it is extremely difficult to know the number of tourists that will visit a resort at any point in time. The number fluctuates very often. This justifies the choice of non-proportional quota sampling for the study. This sampling method though "non-probability" is often described as a "pseudostratified random sampling" and is also commonly used in the literature. The quotas/strata were the two religions: Christianity and Islam

which have been hypothesized to influence the perceived tourism destination image of Plateau State. Furthermore, the convenience/availability sampling method was adopted in the sampling of the tourists at the sampled site for the administration of the study questionnaire. Convenience sampling is helpful especially when it is difficult to draw a probabilistic sample due to a lack of a reliable database as is the case here with the unknown number and distribution of tourists by religion. The method saves time and costs substantially. The Easter period which was April 2022 was used for the data generation. In the end, a total number of 310 domestic tourists were sampled comprising 171 Christian and 139 Muslim tourists. Each sampled tourist was administered the research questionnaire on the perceived tourism destination image/attractiveness of Plateau State before, during and after the major cycles of communal conflicts in the state.

## Results

### Communal Conflicts in Jos Plateau

Findings of the study show that since the first eruption of a violent/bloody communal conflict in September 2001, Jos Plateau has become a "permanent" flashpoint of violent communal clashes. The region, which had hitherto been one of the most peaceful in Nigeria has been deeply enmeshed in a series of bloody communal conflicts which received mainly religious polarization: Christians verse Muslims. As reported by the 'Plateau Resolves' forum in 2008 and many other sources, the incessant communal conflicts that have occurred in the Jos Plateau carry Ethno religious colouration characterized by genocidal attacks, burning of residential houses and worship places, maiming and killings of several persons and loss of business investments and property worth several billions of Naira, all within the spate of about twenty-one years, several violent communal conflicts.

The incessant crises, many with gruesome outcomes, resulted in the first ever State of Emergency imposed on a state in the current Fourth Republic dispensation. There were also periods when bombings were rife, especially in Jos, the state capital. Several villages were sacked by rampaging gunmen and hundreds of lives were lost along with properties worth billions of naira. For over a decade, the profile of Jos Plateau as a "Home of Peace and Tourism" suffered greatly. All efforts to restore peace are yet to achieve the desired end. Here below is a box summary of major cycles and the nature of communal conflicts that occurred in the Jos Plateau from 2001 to 2021 according to Plateau Resolves (2021).

**Table 1: Major Cycles of Crises and challenges that Occurred in the Jos Plateau Region Since 2001**

YEARS	NATURE OF CRISES
2001 - 2002	Ethno-Religious crises and civil disturbances in Jos town, Bassa, and Barkin Ladi

2003 – 2004	Ethno-Religious crises and civil disturbances in Shendam, Langtang North, Langtang South and Wase LGAs led to the imposition of the state of emergency in the state in 2004
2008	Violent Ethno-Religious clashes after Local Government elections
2009-2014	Series of Bombings of Churches and Other Public Places by Insurgent Group or Boko Haram Sect and Attacks and Killings in the Rural Areas (Dogonahawa, Maza and pockets of other villages in Riyom LGA that led to the killing of Senator Dantong in 2010)
2017 - 2021)	Series of herdsmen/terrorist/insurgent attacks on some villages in Bassa, Riyom, Bokkos, Mangu, Barkin Ladi, Jos South and Jos East Local Government Areas killing scores of people and destroying properties. Rampant cases of cattle rustling, senseless and unprovoked killings of innocent people and passersby at roadblocks/checkpoints and along highways Then came the novel dreaded coronavirus (covid 19) outbreak in 2019. The pandemic has destroyed the world's economy and the tourism industry. It is ravaging everywhere unprecedentedly all over the world and it is the worst pandemic ever recorded in the history of mankind destroying/killing several hundreds of thousands of human lives

**Source:** Plateau State Ministry of information, Tourism Corporation, Jos, Print and Audio Media (2021).

### **Perceptions of Tourists about the Tourism Attractiveness of Plateau State Before, During and After Each Cycle of Communal Crises**

Arising from the cycles of bloody communal conflicts which received ethno-religious polarization, an assessment of the people's perception/feelings about the state as a tourist destination over these different time profiles is very crucial and critical in designing befitting marketing and promotion strategies that suit the situation on the ground. And as seen in the immediately preceding section Jos Plateau state has been embroiled in a series of communal crises and conflicts between September 2001 and the present 2022. These have resulted in the death of thousands of people and the destruction of properties worth billions of naira. Associated with this has been the assumed loss of the positive image that the state had groomed over the years. Image is probably the most important concept for interpreting the destination choices made by tourists (Mayo, 1973; Govers & Go, 2003) even though it is difficult for tourists to gain a clear image of a destination without

having visited before (Govers and Go, 2003). Many residents have relocated to other preferred destinations and the stream of tourists, visitors and new residents had dwindled. The reputation of the state as a "home of peace and tourism" has suffered calamitously, nationally and internationally.

The colouration of the conflicts is mostly religious and ethnic or indigeneship which all bother on the very essence of the Nigerian Constitution and its nationhood. These are very sensitive emotional and sentimental issues. The polarization has mostly pitched one camp against another and elicited both sympathy and condemnation from across the country, based on general grounds of religion, ethnicity and geographic origin in the country. As a result of the religious polarized incessant communal conflicts, Jos Plateau no longer enjoyed the prime status it had as a tourist destination in Nigeria. It is the influence of religion on the perceived tourism image of Jos Plateau that is the main interest of the research.

The Nigerian religious landscape has become more polarized with increasing religious fervours and seeming fanaticism being expressed more regularly. The ethno-religious crises in the Jos Plateau had further exacerbated the problem and its unflattering high position in the national debate on the place of religion in Nigeria's quest for nationhood had the potential to introduce bias in the perceived image of the state as a tourist destination. It was, therefore, necessary to specifically investigate the influence of the religion of sampled tourists to Jos Plateau on their perceived tourism destination image of the region. Religion was indeed considered a very critical factor which influences both the general and tourism destination image of Jos Plateau as most of the violent communal conflicts were polarized along the religious divide between Christianity and Islam religions.

**Table 2: Influence of Religious Affiliations of Tourists on Tourism Destination Image Perception**

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.934 <sup>a</sup>	3	.002
Likelihood Ratio	14.222	3	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.376	1	.123
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	<b>310</b>		

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) statistic was used to test the research hypothesis which is on the influence of religion on the perceived destination image of Jos Plateau. Inferentially, the p-value of the Pearson Chi-square (0.002) is less than the  $\alpha$ -value (0.05). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis that religion significantly influences tourists' destination image of Jos Plateau. Empirically, more proportion of Christians submitted that the tourism destination image of Jos Plateau is more attractive than Muslims. Findings clearly show that

Christians were more predisposed to perceiving the tourism destination image of Jos Plateau more positively than the Muslims especially during and after the cycles of violent ethno-religious conflicts in the region mainly because Plateau State is Christian dominated.

### **Discussions of Findings**

The finding of the study has statistically established that the image perceptions before, during and after the ethno-religious crises in Jos Plateau are significantly affected by religious affiliations. The result shows that Christians predominantly hold a more positive tourism image of Jos Plateau than the Muslims during the different periods (before, during and after the ethno-religious clashes) simply because Christianity dominates the Islamic religion in Jos Plateau. Empirically, more proportion of Christians submitted that the tourism destination image of Jos Plateau is attractive during each cycle of the sectarian crises than the Muslims. This study thus concludes that religious conflicts can significantly influence perceptions of the faithful along the lines of their different faiths depending on who sees/says/does what in the conflict and also on who claims he/she is losing or winning the battle. Thus, the factor of religion in image projection/ perception is very germane and must always be taken into consideration in any image assessment.

As Jos Plateau is predominantly a Christian region, then the geography of fear can point to the disadvantage of the Muslims more than the Christians. Destination attractive signals thus sent may be differentially received by the potential tourists from the two faiths. The peace profile of a destination is therefore directly correlated to her projected/perceived image, specifically, the tourism destination image as confirmed by this study. The region which was known for the peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths and ethnic nationalities for so many years went through myriads of serious ethno-religious communal clashes since 2001, which projected a negative image of the state. Thus, a destination with a good tourism image could all of a sudden cripple into a destination with a bad image due to the eruption of communal crises or any natural disaster. The unhealthy situation became quite worrisome to governments, private individuals and corporate bodies (organizations). Responding to the situation, concerted efforts were employed to restore and forestall an enduring peace in the region. These efforts intermittently yielded positive results and at the time of writing this study report, the state was enjoying what can be termed as "relative peace". Things have started normalizing and life is again beginning to blossom. But to date, some people including some tourists are still and skeptical about the regained peace in Jos Plateau. This group still fears that crises can still erupt along ethnoreligious lines and that the peace regained is still volatile.

But suffice it to say that despite the bad image being given to Jos Plateau due to the incessant ethno-religious crises, a good number of tourists of different faiths (Christians and Muslims) still visit the region. Of course, some tourists are very adventurous and curious and would take any risks of

going to a crisis-torn destination. If such a tourist destination painted with a bad image is still being patronized, then it can be said that perhaps it now flourishes as a dark tourism destination. Indeed, all over the world, dark tourism is booming amidst the numerous escalating man-made and natural disasters (crises) scenes befalling the world. For instance, bombed places/facilities, war-torn places, flood scenes, plane crash or accident scenes, fire disaster sites, etc have all become a very attractive disaster or dark tourism destinations. It becomes dark tourism if the "trouble" becomes one of the attractions and activities for the tourists.

The curiosity of some tourists to visit troubled places is therefore questioning whether destination image is always a matter to consider when tourists make their destination choice. Except peace is sustainably restored in Jos Plateau, it may gradually snowball into a busy dark tourism destination as a result of the unprecedented communal crises experienced in the region. The region has a very good share of tourist attractions that can make her be projected and be perceived as a tourist destination with a very good image. Nevertheless, no matter how a tourist destination with a good image could turn into a flourishing dark destination with a very bad image, it is an undesirable fact that no booming destination with a good and bustling image would wish to turn into a dark tourism destination no matter what good benefits the latter holds. The yearnings and struggles of all tourist destinations are to achieve a peaceful and positive image that can surely guarantee sustainable markets. This is the challenge that Jos Plateau must face to save its good image as a "home of peace and tourism" from imminent snowballing into a dark tourism destination despite its rich tourism attractions.

## **Conclusion**

The study has established that the image perception of a tourist's destination affected by religious conflicts as was the case of incessant cycles of bloody ethno-religious conflicts in Jos Plateau can significantly affect the perceived tourism destination image of the destination. And thus arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The findings underscored that today tourists are now prone to travel to destinations based on the image perceived of the chosen destination. They amass information about a destination they are about to visit and may even conceive of images of other different destinations before finally selecting the one that most appealing to them. This finding implies that Jos Plateau as a tourist destination should strive to project positively her tourism image through aggressive promotion campaigns. Destinations with unique, positive, alluring and inviting images are usually at the forefront of being considered. Destination managers should engage in aggressive sales promotion campaigns that are wide and deeply touching to lure investors and tourists to their destinations. Such campaigns should counter any wrongly polished, exaggerated and misleading information which is usually tendered to whip

sentiments that can easily destroy the image of Jos Plateau as in this case. The prevailing tourist destination image determines the promotion strategy that will be suitable in the target markets.

Even though Jos Plateau is renowned for its tourist attractions, however, the emergence of violent communal clashes and terrorism (insurgency) is argued to have perplexed the region's image. Notably, with the alarming increase of ethno-religious conflicts and terrorism/insurgency activities in the region, the issue of safety is ranked as very important when tourism is under discussion. All over the world, aspects of dark tourism scenes abound and some have been dully incorporated into tourism aspects of many countries, especially in "memorials." This is something that can be done in the Jos Plateau, incorporating some "dark" landscapes into the tourism assets of the region.

The researchers also recommend religious tolerance, political understanding and ethnic integration and unity, provision of adequate security, sustainable peace restoration programmes, good planning and development, objective and truthful news reportage about incidences in the state as well as sustainable marketing and promotion strategies which will all boost and sustain a good tourism image for Jos Plateau.

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