

THEORY OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM IN HERITAGE TOURISM: ASSUMPTIONS, CRITICISMS AND APPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The theory of symbolic interactionism indicated that human beings could understand various activities in the society because they have mutual interactions with the environment in the language and symbols they understand. It is assumed that for people to have better understanding of language, signs, symbols, social structures, objects and other attributes of a particular people, this theory emphasized that, intimate interaction is needed to avoid misinterpretation of meanings. This paper examines the nature, principles and assumptions of symbolic interactionism, identifies its criticisms, and then examine how the theory is applied to heritage tourism. The reviews revealed that every community or group is distinctive. The function that people attached to a particular object or event makes it meaningful and this meaning can change as a result of certain circumstances in the community. Also, in heritage tourism, the mutual understanding between cultures can create an opportunity for acquaintance leading towards enhanced understanding and tolerance, and consequently, reduce prejudice, conflict and tension between the hosts, attractions, tourists and their interests.

Keywords: symbolic interactionism; heritage; tourism; theory

Introduction

Symbols are the physical representations of thoughts, oneself and ideologies. Interaction means the interrelationships between people and their common environment. The foremost proponents of the theory of symbolic interactionism are Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. The basic aspect of the theory of symbolic interaction is that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what that is objectively true. In this case, people act toward things according to the meanings those things have for them, and these meanings are derived from cordially social interaction and modified through personal interpretation. This theory postulates that human beings are best understood in a practical and interactive relation to their immediate environment (Blumer, 1969). He added that for human beings to establish better interactions with others and objects, they must develop a complex set of symbols that gives meaning to the world in their perspective. The meanings are molded from the interactions with the society; and these interactions are subjectively interpreted by them to suit the meaning following the existing symbols. It can be said that, if we need to understand

the behavioural patterns of society, we need to first understand the existing symbols. The interactions which molded the symbols also create a social structure. The symbolic interactionism also articulates that individuals build a sense of self-identity through these interactions with society. The symbolic interactionist perspective thus envisages a dynamic social world in which people act based on the meanings of objects in their world and these meanings are constructed through specific situational interpretation and social interactions (Blumer, 1969, Oliver, 2011).

The history of symbolic interactionism stretches back through the 19th century, it emerged as a prominent theoretical perspective in American sociology during the 1960s. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes on micro-processes through which people construct meanings, identities, and joint acts. In doing so, it accentuates how symbols, interaction, and human agency serve as the cornerstones of social life. Symbolic interactionism grew out of the American philosophical tradition of pragmatism in the late 19th century and it has been described as one of the most enduring theories in the 20th century (Plummer, 2000). The most important bridge between the pragmatic tradition and sociology was George Herbert Mead, who is known as the "founding father of symbolic interactionism. One of his most famous books, *Mind, Self, and Society* is often taken as a charter for the symbolic interactionist approach. Along with Mead, two other important early sociologists who shaped the interactionist tradition were Charles Horton Cooley and William Isaac Thomas. Mead argued that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also purposive and creative, and believed that the true test of any theory was that it was useful in solving complex social problems (Griffin, E., 2006). According to Oliver, Carolyn (2011: 3), "Mead drew from behaviourism, but redefined human behaviour as a response to individual interpretations of the world rather than to the world itself". He maintained that human beings engage in a constant process of meaning-making, or "mind action" which intercedes between external stimuli and human behaviour (Charon, 2007, Oliver, 2011).

The most influential contributor to the theory of symbolic interactionism was Herbert Blumer, who coined the perspective's label in 1937. Blumer's book, titled *Symbolic Interactionism* serves as another foundational work for the perspective. Blumer was the first scholar to use symbolic interaction as a term or concept, he is known as one of the foremost founders of the theory of symbolic interaction (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın, Mufit and Demirbuken, 2009). He believed that the "most human and humanizing activity that people engage in is talking to each other" (Griffin, 2006), which is symbolic in every community. According to Blumer (1986), human groups are created by people and the actions between them defined a society. He argued that with/through interactions,

individuals can "produce common symbols by approving, arranging, and redefining them. "Symbolic interactionism had its most significant impact on sociology between 1950 and 1985. In challenging functionalism, the dominant sociological paradigm of the 1950s, interactionists urged their colleagues to examine how people "do social life", that is, how they construct and negotiate meanings, order, and identities in their everyday interactions. Interactionists stressed that sociologists could best understand social life's core features by taking the role of the individuals or groups they were studying, particularly by engaging in cordial interaction and participant observation (Alver and Caglar, 2015).

By 1980s mainstream sociology had accepted much of the core of the symbolic interactionist approach, with its emphases on meaning, agency, and the interpretive analysis of interactional processes, as a legitimate and central part of the discipline. Thus, interactionism no longer represented a distinctive oppositional perspective as it had previously. In recent decades, interactionism has grown in several new directions. Concerning methodology, its approach has broadened to include contextualized discourse analysis, ethnographic observation, content analysis, textual analysis, performance studies, and auto-ethnography. Interactionism has also become a more prominent perspective in a diverse array of disciplines (Hall, Peter, 2007, Alver and Caglar, 2015). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that develops from practical considerations and alludes to people's particular utilization of dialect to make images, normal implications, for deduction and correspondence with others (Hall, Peter, 2007, Alver and Caglar, 2015). In another way, it is a frame of reference to better understand how individuals interact with one another to create symbolic words, and in return, how these words shape individual behaviours. It is a pragmatic method to interpret social interactions (Alver and Caglar, 2015).

Main Features of Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

George J. McCall (1977) offers the following principles as underlying symbolic interactionism, and the set can be taken as his summarization of the framework:

- Man is a planning animal, constructing plans out of bits and pieces supplied by culture. He plans to make his environment meaningful.
- Things take on meaning about plans; the meaning of a thing is its implications for plans of action being constructed, so a thing may have different meanings relative to different plans.
- We plan toward things in terms of their meanings; a plan of action is executed contingent on the meaning for that plan of things encountered.

Consequently, everything encountered must be identified and its meaning discovered.

- For social plans of action, meaning must be consensual; if meanings are not clear, they are hammered out through the rhetoric of interaction resulting in the creation of social objects.
- The basic thing to be identified in any situation is the person himself; identities of actors in a situation must be consensually established.
- Identity, meaning, and social acts are the stuff of drama; as drama involves parts to be played, roles implicit in the parts must be conceived and performed in ways expressive of the role. The construction of social conduct involves roles and characters, props and supporting casts, scenes and audiences.

Evolution of the Theory

According to McCall (2013) and Redmond (2015), this theory does not have the types of dramatic changes or adaptations found with other theories. Instead of being discarded, replaced, or overhauled; symbolic interactionism's history reflects reinterpretation of core principles and concepts. The primary evolution and amendment of the theory are primarily in terms of its focus, application, and interpretations. Scholars redefine the concept based on how it relates to their disciplines. Sociologists tend to focus on the theory as it applies to the issues of society and groups while social psychologists emphasize the development of the self and social interactions. The tourism sector emphasises on the relationships and interests that exist between the destination, its people, attractions, and the tourists.

Basic Assumptions and Principles of Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

According to Herbert Blumer's conceptual perspective, the three principal assumptions of this theory are: a) that people act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; b) that these meanings are derived through social interaction with others; and c) that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds. Blumer summarily suggested that the theory of symbolic interactionism is bounded by three core principles, which are: meaning, language and thought (Blumer, 1986). For the purpose of this work, the main assumptions and the three core principles of the theory of symbolic interactionism according to Blumer (1969) can be summarized and explained under the following: meaning, language, symbolization, thought and social structure.

a) Meaning: is the interpretation given to things or actions as they are understood. Symbolic interaction holds the central aspect of human behaviour. That is, we are always driven by the need to make 'meaning out of' things, events, interactions, feelings, symbols and circumstances. According to Blumer (1986), "people act towards things based on the meaning those things have for them, and the meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation". The function that people attached to a particular object makes it meaningful in society. The meaning attached to an object or event can also change as a result of certain circumstances in society. For instance, the old Nigerian currencies have lost their value after demonetization, and nobody is saving them for transaction any more but as mnemonic national, historical and chronological objects; likewise, the meanings attached to some objects and event change with time.

The meaning of things arises out of the social interactions one has with one's fellows or objects. A personal example is a finger ring that I wear every day. To some people, it would be nothing more than an accessory, but the real reason I wear it is not for fashion but it is engraved in and with our wedding's anniversary. These meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretative process that a person uses in dealing with the things he or she encounters. According to Blumer's view, it is acceptable that human beings proffer meanings on objects, activities and symbols in the community which other people cannot assimilate and comprehend unless through close interaction. Likewise, to in cultural heritage, every cultural object and activity in various communities has some peculiarities that are common, understood and interpreted by the users which cannot be comprehended by the outsiders who are not associating with them. This uniqueness is the core interests of the tourists.

All traditional events like festivals, naming, marriage, circumcision, etc. have some cogent and important meanings in the lives of the people and the objects associated with them also have functional meanings to indicate what they are used for in that particular community because they are unique cultural symbols. For instance, to some, cowries are just ivory objects from the ocean that are used for decorations, but in other parts of the globe, among the Yoruba, southwestern part of Nigeria, it is beyond that, they are used to pray for wealth because they are traditional symbols of wealth (*aje*) among them.

b) Language: This is an illustration of symbolic interaction. Words are symbols and we point out meanings through the use of words that we understand. Words have commonly accepted meanings but it may not always be so for all people and in all situations. Language is viewed as the source of all meanings (Garfinkel, Harold, 1967). Social constructionist Herbert Blumer illuminates several key features about social

interactionism, and according to him, most people interpret things based on assignment and purpose, and interaction occurs once the meaning of something has become identified through understandable language expression. This concept of meaning is what starts to construct the framework of social reality. By aligning social reality, according to Blumer language gives meaning to interaction or communication because verbal and non-verbal forms of communication are connected with language that initiates them among people. Blumer defines this source of meaning as a connection that arises out of the social interaction that people have with each other (Blumer, 1986).

Language makes symbols and interactions comprehensible to the mind and helps in formulating assumptions. According to the theory, the naming assigned through the language creates meanings to everything, and everything has its name. In naming a thing, the knowledge about it is important and thus indicates some features or any other kind of knowledge about it. This knowledge is converted into names through language (Blumer, 1986). Example, when we say HAVE A DINNER OUTSIDE, people who listen makes sense of it based on their perspectives and understanding. Some will interpret it as just to go out to eat while someone may think that having dinner outside means A DATE. In the community, language is one of the principal heritages that are passed successfully through generations. It distinguishes a country, tribe and community from others. That is why what something is named in a community or country might be different from others based on language disparities.

c) Symbolization: Symbols are crucial as people interact and go along with their general ways of life in the community. According to Okpoko and Onyekwelu (2015), it is believed that "symbols and the meanings and values to which they refer, do not usually occur in isolation but clusters. A cluster of related meanings and values may guide and direct an individual's behaviour in any given social group or society". Symbolism highlights the processes through which events and conditions, artefacts, people, and other environmental features that take on particular meanings, becoming nearly only objects of orientation.

Human behaviour is partly contingent on what the object of orientation symbolizes or means. This theory believes that different people with different background have different meanings attached to the same symbol in their various societies. For instance, THUMPS UP SYMBOL is more like appreciation or good luck wishes in the western side and some other cultures including Nigeria, but in places like Russia and Greece, it is seen as an insult. In this case, human beings interact understandably with the use of symbols, and the most important of which is contained in the language we speak in society (Okpoko et al, 2015).

d) Thought: This principle of thought point to the interpretations that we have assigned to symbols. The basis of thought is language. It is the process of mentally conversing about meanings, names and symbols. The thought includes the imagination, which has the power to provide an idea even before an unknown thing based on known knowledge. The best example of thought is 'to think'. Another aspect of symbolic interaction theory is the premise that people behave based on what they have thought and believed and not just on what is objectively true, this is because the interpretation given to objects, events, relationships, interaction or things is solely based on personal thought and interpretation (Blumer, 1986). To reach a consensus about things, people and activities, there must be mutual interactions with their background either through observations, interviews, documentary information, survey and some other ways of getting the full meaning and clue about the subject matter in order to avoid personal biases and misinterpretations.

e) Social Structure: Symbolic interactionism is often related and connected with social structure. This concept suggests that symbolic interactionism is a construction of people's social reality (Stryker, 1968). It also implies that from a realistic point of view, the interpretations that are being made will not make much difference if people from different societal background have the same meaning and interpretation to a particular object or event. When the reality of a situation is defined, the situation becomes a meaningful reality. This includes methodological criticisms and critical sociological issues.

A number of symbolic interactionists have addressed these topics, the best known being Sheldon Stryker's structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker, 1968, Stryker, 1994), and the formulations of interactionism heavily influenced by this approach (sometimes referred to as the "Indiana School" of symbolic interactionism), including the works of key scholars in sociology and psychology using different methods and theories applying a structural version of interactionism that are represented in a 2003 collection edited by Burke et al. Another well-known structural variation of symbolic interactionism that applies quantitative methods is Manford H. Kuhn's formulation which is often referred to in sociological literature as the "Iowa School". "Negotiated order theory" also applies a structural approach (Burke, Burke, Peter, and Co, 2003).

Criticisms of Theory of Symbolic Interaction

1) The key concepts are confused and imprecise: According to Meltzer (1978) and (Stryker, Sheldon, 1990) theory of symbolic interactionism was criticized because the key concepts are confused, imprecise, and do not lend themselves to a sound theory; its concepts are difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize because it lacks clarity. According to Mark Redmond (2015),

the concepts that Mead wrote about were not organized in a particularly systematic or integrated manner; after all, his major book, *Mind, Self, and Society*, is based on notes taken by students of Mead's social psychology course. This has resulted in many different interpretations of what Mead meant as well as the incorporation of a variety of additional ideas into the theory by other scholars. Differences in the interpretations have led to ongoing arguments among scholars. For example, Herbert Blumer's explanation and expansion of Mead's work was derided by other scholars for misinterpreting Mead's ideas (Shalin, 2011).

2) It cannot be tested scientifically: Few testable propositions can be formulated in this theory because the scientific explanation is rejected in favour of intuitive insight or understanding, and it is mostly emphasizing on reflexive thought (Stryker, 1990). Any acceptable theory must be scientifically proven, tested, measured and verifiable in nature. This theory cannot be quantitatively examined or assessed empirically.

3) It neglects social structure and social life: symbolic interactionism truncates the values of social structure and refuses to take into cognizance the aspect of social life; the emphases on actors' definitions on the immediate situation of action and the emergent character of organized behaviour deny or minimize the facts of social structure and the importance of large-scale features of society, and leave the perspective incapable of dealing adequately with those large-scale features; and then, the neglect of social structure constitutes an ideological bias (Stryker, 1990).

4) It underplays the import of general emotions: It is stated that the theory of symbolic interactionism, at least in degree, neglects the emotions in its emphasis on reflexivity, thinking and self-consciousness. According to Stryker (1968), this theory has many indications that more emphases are positioned on individual feelings and thoughts. The proponents of this theory have more interest in personal interpretations than on general views because meanings are conferred on objects, feelings, symbols, events and social structures based on individual interaction with them. Rationally, this should not be a criticism because in human environment, culture is unique, not generalized, to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of people's way of life. The symbolic method of understanding the feelings of others is to interact with the affected ones and not to judge them by general conjectures and views.

Application of the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism in Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism is a vast and heterogeneous sector because it comprises movement to a destination other than the place of residence and work in order to appreciate or research on the irreplaceable people's ways of life. Onyejegbu (2014) stated cultural heritage as the peoples' way of

life, in the broad sense, their traditional behaviour which include the tangible (artifacts, traditional architectures, costumes, work implements, etc.) and intangible resources (ceremonies, dramas, songs, legends, proverbs, etc.) which are passed on from one generation to another. Heritage tourism is about cultural attractions in diversity. Diversity in the sense that all creatures and events have different and unique nomenclatures according to the symbols and functions they represent. Whatever they represent indicates their functions in that particular society. Also, "tourism projects are known to have some socio-cultural effects on the residents/visitors to areas they are located, be they customers (tourists), inhabitants, owners and government" (Ukabuilu & Okpoko, 2016: 119), but despite this, the tourists should always respect the value the host community has on their symbolic sites, objects and events. This is the reason why the proponents of this theory believed that symbols, meanings and interactions can assure a better understanding of human behaviour in society. According to Charon (2007), symbolic interactionism can be considered a useful way of understanding and thinking about tourists' places, spaces, interests, attitude, identity, performances and lived experiences. For Charon, these are the instances where individuals decide on their actions based on taking into account other people's actions; in essence, we are constantly acting and reacting symbolically. The tourists in their interactions with the host community, attractions and the environment must at all cost consider the sustainability of material and immaterial values of the society.

There are several cultural and historical objects, events, signs and features that are highly symbolic in the various communities in which their meanings and usefulness are fathomable to those utilizing them or those who have cordial interaction with them. For instance, the genealogy and features of festivals are perfectly interpreted by those celebrating them because they are irreplaceable traditional events of the people with communal meanings. Also, the historical sites, modes of dressing, language, food, work implement, songs, proverbs, etc. are communal symbols of the people which are also representations of the people's heritage. There is a need for mutual and understandable interaction with the people before the visitors can properly understand them. Moreover, socio-political structures in every community are symbolic representations of the people's heritage. These cultural groups and structures are performing different roles according to the traditions in the community, but these roles cannot be understood by the foreigners unless they are initiated into the group or interacted with those who are knowledgeable about the groups. This move will bring perfect understanding about the group without any misconception.

Wilson (1980: 36) suggested that leisure is "a form of symbolic interaction in which distinct meanings emerge and are displayed". This

personal meaning that people can develop for leisure and sport over time also supports the use of a symbolic interactionist perspective as an appropriate theoretical framework in tourism. In the past, a symbolic interactionist framework has been used in the study of various aspects of the sport. For example, Fine (1986) chose to use this perspective in the study of small groups and sport. This approach to the study allowed him to focus on the meanings created in a team sport and on how these meanings influence their mode and pattern of playing. Snyder (1986) also used a symbolic interaction perspective to investigate athletics in higher education. Specific areas of consideration included the meanings and definitions attached to the sport, the construction and conservation of identity by players and coaches, and the way that interactionism clarifies the negotiated order of athletic organizations. Weiss (2001) supports the idea that "sport is shaped by and derives symbolic significance from its close links with society" (p. 393). Just like the patterns of playing can be influenced by the meaning attached to sport, in tourism the value people have towards their heritage go a long way in managing and promoting them in the community.

According to Williams (1998), each arrival of foreign tourists into a local community inevitably provokes positive and negative influences. The main positive influence refers to the increased knowledge and understanding of hosts societies and cultures, which refers to positive interaction that emanated between the people and the tourists. In this case, the more tourists interact with the people, the more it brings development to the host community. Frequent interaction of tourists will help to provide social infrastructures and amenities and increase the rate of employment opportunities within the host community. According to Higgitt and Memken (2001), if there is high tourism demand, the relationship between attractions and tourists could create greater opportunities for the host community such as networking, sharing of symbols, cooperation, and stronger attachment to the community. These include front and rear porches, the layout of streets that encourage neighbour contacts rather than isolation, park-like spaces, wide sidewalks, placement of schools close to homes, local libraries, close-by community and childcare centers, adequate outdoor lighting for better safety, convenient transportation hubs, and easy access to service providers and businesses.

Pizam, Uriely, N., & Reichel (2000), through a study of 388 working tourists in Israel, found out that the social relationship between hosts and working tourists could affect tourists' feelings, satisfaction and attitudes towards the destination. Their study demonstrated that the higher the intensity of the social relationship between hosts and working tourists, the more favourable were the tourists' feelings towards their hosts, and the more positive was the change in attitudes towards hosts and the destination. It also reported that the higher the intensity of the social relationship

between hosts and tourists, the higher was the satisfaction of these tourists with their stay and experience. On the other hand, according to Pizam et al. (2000), tourism can provide negative effects such as debasement and the commoditization of culture, increased tensions between imported and traditional lifestyles, erosion of strength of a local language, new patterns of local consumption, and risks of promotion of antisocial activities (gambling, drugs, violence, etc.). These negative impressions can only be resolved if the tourism consumers are aware of the authenticity of the attractions through intermingling with the people to know the real feelings of the custodians towards cultural attractions and how they should be treated. The first impression of the tourists in a particular destination towards the attractions, the people and the environment matters; and likewise, the feelings of the host community towards the tourists in regards to the utilisation of resources and attitude generally, can be known through dialogue in which each part is given appropriate chance to express personal feelings. This method of interaction will help to ameliorate subsequent activities.

The relationship between residents and foreign tourists is created by the ratio between the behaviour of foreign tourists in the tourist destination and the way local people perceive this behaviour. How the local people perceive the behaviour of foreign tourists and evaluate it as positive or negative, is determined primarily by cultural and moral norms of the population of a certain destination. However, one must take into account that the behaviour of tourists during their stay in the tourist destination often does not reflect the everyday lifestyle of foreign tourists. It means that tourists' behaviour seems more relaxed during holidays, which is perceived in wearing casual clothes, increased food and beverages consumption, as well as in the trend of getting more entertainment.

Such behaviour commonly creates a negative image of the country of their origin for the local population (Williams, 1998). The interaction between hosts and international guests (tourists) raises another issue linked to cultural tolerance. As argued by Bochner (1982), the mutual understanding between cultures can create an opportunity for acquaintance leading towards enhanced understanding and tolerance and consequently, reduce prejudice, conflict and tension between hosts and tourists. According to Jiaying Zhang et.al (2006) host community's behaviour in interacting with tourists is important for the long-term development of the tourism industry, directly, it influences tourists' satisfaction and attitudes toward the hosts and destinations and this may affect their decision regarding repeat visitation. Furthermore, these tourists may spread their impressions, feelings and attitudes concerning the destination among their families, friends and colleagues by sharing their travel experience with them. All

these will affect the destination's ability to attract return visitors as well as to generate new visitors.

According to Tiffanie L. Skipper (2009), host-guest interaction is an inevitable occurrence while on vacation, and tourists can assume their interaction with the host community will result in positive experiences. However, when tourists encounter negative experiences, conflicting attitudes may arise towards the local community and vice versa. He further stated that in many Caribbean islands, the negative experience most often experienced by tourists is harassment but in the long run through frequent interaction and understanding, normalcy was put in place. Kingsbury (2005) describes the initial communication between hosts and guests in Jamaica as uneasy and uncomfortable as guests are greeted by pimps, prostitutes, beach vendors, drug dealers, and other sources of harassment. This negative behaviour is the leading cause for dissatisfaction and complaints and the most frequently identified negative experience conveyed by tourists (Kozak, 2006). However, for the sustainable development of tourism in a destination, one of the crucial things is to create a positive interaction between residents and foreign tourists. The quality of interaction between tourists and residents contributes to both tourists' experience and perception of the visited destination and acceptance and tolerance of tourist by residents. The attitude and interests of the host community and the tourists are known through interactions. These interactions will determine how cultural destinations and attractions will be protected and sustained. If there are unresolvable conflicts of interests between them, the attractions, host community and the tourists are in danger.

Discussion and Summary

According to Mark Redmond (2015), there is a plus side to the lack of clarity and structure. These qualities have led scholars to use the various elements that constitute symbolic interactionism in a way that fit their particular interests and concerns. As such, there are few, if any, areas of human interaction to which symbolic interaction has not been applied. For example, the 2003 Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism includes review articles that cover such topics as economy, politics, families, the military, deviance, gender, childhood, and mass media. All of the coordination, communication, and rise of institutions that result in the development of a society are only possible because of symbolic interactions within the society. "...symbols create and maintain the societies within which we exist. They are used to socialize us; they make our culture possible; they are the basis for ongoing communication and cooperation; and they make possible our ability to pass down knowledge from one generation to the next" (Charon, 2007: 61). For Mead, societies can't exist without self. The

interaction of selves gives rise to society; however, selves emerge as a result of society. He was driven by a desire to understand the relationship between individuals and societies; between a self and others. As simple as it might seem, one profound insight he had was that a person's sense of self emerges from interaction with others (social interaction/society) and that societies emerge from interactions among people's selves. Neither the self nor society can exist without the other (Mark V. Redmond, 2015)

The theory of symbolic interactionism is all about personal interpretation and representation. It is the meaning that is attached to a particular object or others that usually gives the right indication about the subject matter. This theory explains the 'self' of every person by the way they interact with other persons or things. Meaning, language and thought according to Blumer are classified as the three main principles of this theory. The individual meanings that are proffered on things and events can be different from general interpretations. Likewise, in various communities, meanings, language and functions differ. For instance, the cutlass is mostly and generally being used to cut grasses, but in another place like an abattoir, it is being used to slaughter animals. Interaction brings about a better understanding and interpretation.

It is different from a mere thought. Those who belong to the same background understand themselves and their objects more than the outsiders. The proponents of this theory believed that the more we associate, the more meaningful and understandable we become because people have different meanings to the same symbol in the society, and for people to appreciate things, there must be perfect conviction and interaction. The major shortcoming of this theory is that it cannot be quantified, verified and tested scientifically. It has more or less relied on personal conviction, personal thought and personal interpretations which cannot be generalized to give the verifiable result. This theory is useful in tourism sectors to have a perfect understanding of the environment. Every activity of human beings for perfect interaction and understanding are symbolic in nature because man cannot do without making use of symbols or objects in society.

According to Mead (1934: 151) and Dmitri (1991: 238), all objects surrounding us, insofar as they have a definite shape and meaning, are socially constructed; society is the source of everything we call "objective," and by the same token, of everything we label "merely subjective". Mead further argued that "all objects are originally social objects... The physical object is an abstraction which we make from the social response to nature... The objectivity of the perspective of the individual lies in its being a phase of the larger act. It remains subjective in so far as it cannot fall into the larger social perspective..." Despite these criticisms, according to Dmitri Shalin (1991: 245), one can admit that symbolic interactionism meets the desiderata of post-modern science. Interactionists have always been aware

that the sociologist is a participant-observer whose research act informs the reality under investigation. Since its inception, symbolic interactionism has accentuated the link between scholarship and criticism. The interactionists' commitment to understanding social reality in-situ rather than in-toto conforms to the maxim of "local determinism" (Lyotard 1984). Interactionists accord special status to uncertainty and indeterminacy as phenomena in their own right. The entire edifice of interactionist sociology could be seen as a counterpart to non-classical, humanistic physics. Viewed from this vantage point, social reality is the ongoing process of terminating indeterminacy and social order is a work of sculpture carved out every moment anew. The emphasis here is on the historically situated agency or self. The latter is a non-classically propertied object par excellence; it exists in several states at once and requires a quantum of action for rendering one of it possible (Dmitri Shalin, 1991: 245).

Conclusion

Despite various disparagements about the theory of symbolic interactionism, its contributions to human relationship with other people, events and objects (animate and inanimate) cannot be overemphasized. It brings about cultural identity thereby distinguishes a particular community from others. These dissimilar identities brought about multiple attractions in the community and country at large. The identities include language, artefacts, mode of dressing, tribal marks, names, food, festivals, etc. The meanings and real interpretations of animate and inanimate objects are coded. In this case, only those who have direct and frequent interactions with the object can understand or decipher the signs and symbols associated with them; thereby giving way for more in-depth researches among the scholars because meanings and functions assigned to an object in a particular community might differ in other community; as a result of this, interpretation of an object should be according to the purpose it serves in the study area. This makes every culture unique and valuable. No culture is superior to the other.

The theory informs about how the designed physical environments contain and communicate our shared ideas, symbols and meanings (Gieryn, 2000; Mead, 1934). Theory of symbolic interaction reveals that this designed physical environment is not merely a backdrop for our behaviour. Quite the contrary, some designed physical buildings, places, and objects act as agents to shape our thoughts and actions in our immediate environment; they invite self-reflection (Ronald and Valerie, 2006: 125). According to Okpoko, A. I. and Onu Onyekwelu (2015) "symbolic interaction are necessary since man has no instincts to direct his behaviour. He is not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli. To survive he must, therefore, construct and live within a world of

meaning. Social life can only proceed if the meanings of symbols are largely shared by members of the society". This theory makes all activities of man in society meaningful. It is believed that with symbolic interaction, human beings take the role of physical objects and places they continuously interact with and form a social relationship with the environment, and these physical objects and places have a profound impact on their behavioural pattern in the society. Symbolic interactionists are not alone in their views about designed forms. The field of material culture holds that the physical environment is "socially alive" and that physical objects, mind, and behaviour exist in co-dependency (Knappert, 2002). The theory of symbolic interaction maintains that representations of ideas and thoughts in the form of objectification make the interaction of man in society meaningful.

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