SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF INFANT JESUS OF MIRACLE SHRINE, OBANLIKU.

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Abstract
The study of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine, Arkorshi-Bendi, Obanliku local government area of Cross River State was aimed at identifying and documenting the implications of faith-based activities to sustainable tourism development in Nigeria. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. Three research questions guided the study. Two research methods (in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires) were used to elicit useful information. The in-depth interviews were with selected knowledgeable people within the study area, while questionnaires were structured on a 4-point rating scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The research questions were answered using mean scores and standard deviation. The sample for this study consisted of 180 respondents made up of 180 business owners and community members in the Akorshi community. The findings show that the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has great positive social and economic impacts on the host community through the influx of tourists to the Obudu Mountain Resort. Nevertheless, this site suffers some challenges like lack of government attention and tour guides, lousy road network, and lack of accommodation within the site, among others. The challenges have affected the volume of tourists to the destination lately. The paper argues that for religious tourism to develop and compete favourably with its counterparts in developed countries, the government should pay more attention to faith-based activities; this would also guarantee peace among its citizenry, create job opportunities, achieve spiritual affection, and increase revenue generation to mention but a few.

Keywords: Religious tourism, Socio-economic impacts, Tourism development, Pilgrimage, Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine, Obanliku.

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Introduction

Research shows that the two major religions and belief systems that form faith tourism in Obanliku are traditional religion and Christianity. The primary function of the traditional belief was to provide divine protection and sanctions, as well as legitimacy and regulations governing claims on resources, especially agricultural land and house sites. Also, rights of access to resources, political offices, economic activities, or social relations were defined and legitimised by traditional religious beliefs in the past. The traditional religious life of Obanliku people is exemplified in their festivals associated with deities such as Obanliku new yam festival which is celebrated every last Saturday of September. The festival promotes the exchange of gifts, love, and peace among the people.

Christianity, on the other hand, is regarded as a majority religion in Obanliku local government area in recent times. The first Christian doctrine in Obanliku was the Catholic Church domiciled in several villages of Obanliku. Other Christian religions like Assemblies of God Church, Pentecostal Church, and Winner's Chapel International are fast springing up. It should be noted that religion has brought about education and schools in the study area, which has helped to promote their cultural and social life.

Although religious travel is one of the historical forerunners of today's mass tourism, faith tourism is recognised as making significant economic contributions in many nations that have harnessed its potential resources for tourism development (Okonkwo, 2015:10). Shinde (2003) proposes a model of the dynamics of pilgrimage or religious tourism, which allows us to further understand the interaction between faith-based tourists and host community and the associated impacts. As depicted, there is both an immediate impact on the hosts' environment due to the direct contact of the visitors with the religious institutions, and also an indirect impact on the local economy and society. The first and most obvious impact of pilgrimage tourism is through the visits to the religious site and the visitor's contact with the religious institutions. However, apart from the religious institutions, holy sites are often surrounded by religiously orientated businesses and facilities, such as souvenir shops, travel agencies, hotels, and even hospitals, employing the host community (Evans, 1998). Andereck *et al.* (2005) posited that residents could have a positive attitude towards tourism if they enjoy the benefit of tourism; thus, tourism facilities and amenities need to be provided to the residents leaving around the destination.

It should be noted that residents whose tourism destination positively portrays religious and cultural heritage would be more likely to support tourism development than those whose religious and cultural heritage is ignored. In particular, the sale of religious souvenir items, for example, sacred water (Maseeh, 2002), icons and candles (Evans, 1998) or other religious things (Dubish, 1995) brings in considerable revenue, (Okonkwo 2015, Okonkwo and Nzeh 2009, and Fleischer 2000). According to

Secall (2003), this material perspective of interest brought about by pilgrimages has always been present in human history.

Of all the Christian religious groups in Obanliku L.G.A., one that attracts adherents and admirers from far and wide is the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine. The shrine is a tourist outfit located at the northern Cross River State in Obanliku L.G.A. The site is endowed with tourism potentials that could hold religious tourists spellbound if properly harnessed, and can also be a significant source of income for the state in particular and Nigeria at large. However, the lack of needed attention from the government and tourism stakeholders has been a significant blow to the growth of religious tourism in Nigeria. The study seeks to address this problem by documenting the research finds, and thus, bring the study area to the limelight, and attract the attention of stakeholders towards further development.

Research Methodology

A survey research design was used to prosecute the study. As noted by Kelinger (1986) survey research is directed toward determining the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the investigation. The survey research design is economical in the sense that a study of representing samples will permit inferences from generalisation to a population that could be too expensive to study as a whole.

The target population for this study was business owners around the site and community members who have encounters with tourists. The reason for choosing business owners and community members was because they see the impact on their business and community, and are ready to give feedback if it affects them positively or negatively, The businesses in Akorshi community include shops, restaurants, farms, motorcycles, guesthouses, The sample of this study was drawn from business owners and community members in Akorshi Community in Obanliku Local Government area working in through a stratified random sampling technique. The business owners and community members were stratified into eighty business owners and a hundred host community members. Business owners and community members were randomly selected, thus, making a total of 180 business owners and community members.

Hence, 180 business owners and community members in Akorshi Community were selected for the study. The instrument for data collection was in-depth interviews with selected knowledgeable business owners and community members as well as a questionnaire structured on a 4 – point rating of Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (DA) 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. The instrument was first validated by two experts from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation, Cross River University of Technology. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha formula. The reliability coefficient value yielded 0.86 on average which was considered adequate for the study.

The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher and three research assistants. A total of 180 copies of the questionnaires were administered and collected on the spot from the respondents. Data obtained were analyzed using the mean score and standard deviation. Any mean score lower than 2.50 implied disagree, while equal to or higher than 2.50 implied agree with the items.

Background Information of the Study Area

The infant Jesus of miracle shrine is a pilgrimage site currently located in Akorshi community in Obanliku local government area of Cross River State. The shrine was developed in 2003 by Rev. Fr. Bruno Anthony Uke (a Catholic priest). Ethnographic sources revealed that Father Bruno was led by the Holy Spirit to develop this site in order to rescue the people of Obanliku from the ungodly life and bring them closer to their creator.

The shrine was first situated in Begiaba community in Obudu local government area of Cross River State in 2003. Due to the influx of religious tourists to this site, there was a need for expansion; thus, the site was moved to its present location now in Akorshi community in 2007. The infant Jesus of miracles shrine has currently managed a congregation known as the "*Spiritans*" (Catholic Holy Ghost Priests).

Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State was created by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida on August 27, 1991. The local government is in the northern senatorial district of Cross River State; it is both an interstate and international boundary local government area. It is bounded in the north by Kwanda Local Government of Benue State; in the East by the Republic of Cameroon, in the West by Obudu Local Government Area and in the South by Boki Local Government Area.

Obanliku has four primary Linguistic groups: Bendi, Obanliku, Utanga, and Bechere; it has a population of about 126,740 people. The principal occupation of the people is farming of cocoa production, cassava, yams, and honey. Obanliku comprises ten (10) wards: Bendi I, Bendi II, Beshiri South, Beshiri East, Bebi, Utanga, Becheve, Busi, Basang, and Ulanga. Each ward comprises five villages.

The Obanliku people's main cultural festival is the new yam festival, celebrated on the last Saturday of September every year. Other festivals are coronation/title-taking and traditional marriage. The people practice both Christianity and traditional religions. Studies have shown that about 80% of Obanliku population are Catholics; this is because of the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine activities and influence in the area. Cultural activities that are part of the social lifestyle of the people from generation to generation include inter-village cultural dance, burial ceremonies, age grades, communal farming, etc. Notable markets are Bendi centre market, Utanga market, Amana market, Amagashic market, and Sankwala market. These markets trade every four native days.

Though the people have several traditional cultures that bind them together, they are also known for their religious activities, which have contributed to making the local government famous; and a religious pilgrimage site where people come from different parts of the world to worship and renew their faith, strength and relationship with their creator.

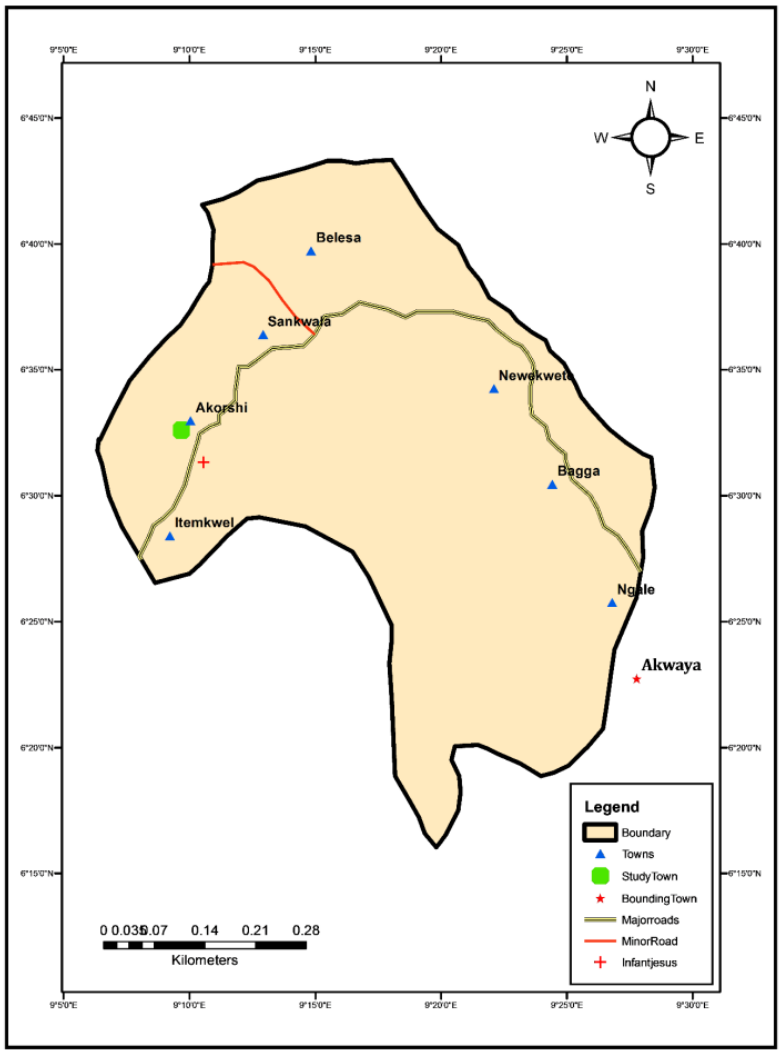


Figure 1: Map of Obanliku L.G.A Showing the Study Area

Theoretical Framework

Faith tourism has been considered as physical travel for finding spiritual solutions to physical problems or the meaning of life (Willson *et al.* 2013). Faith-based tourism is almost known as the oldest form of tourism and could be traced way back to the dawn of humanity (Okonkwo 2015;

Wong *et al.* 2013). According to Olsen & Timothy (2006), religious tourism has assumed the oldest form of noneconomic journeys, and approximately 240 million people visit holy places annually. The movements of religious tourists are exemplified in the four most prominent religions of the world: 1) Christianity with adherent estimates of 2.4 billion (33.51%); 2) Islam 1.6 billion (22.32%); 3) Secular/Non-religious/Agnostic/Atheist is less than 1.1 billion (15.35%) and 4) Hinduism by 1.15 billion (16.06%) (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations). Religious tourists are interested in visiting holy places for different reasons, such as a contribution to heritage or culture, for a sense of curiosity or even to enjoy the landscape of that place or site (Okonkwo 2015; Wong *et al.* 2013). Drule, *et al.* (2012) stressed that the sense of being a better human is the main factor of (faith) spiritual journeys.

The central importance of tourism and especially faith tourism has become manifest since a human has experienced a sense of curiosity regarding knowledge about cultures, natures and shrines. The necessity of tourism has appeared based on the purpose of tourism and according to this concept; a variety of these phenomena has been formed. The concept of travel helps people to gain a better understanding towards human values, and universal respect. Religious tourism which is sometimes named spiritual tourism has achieved a determinant role all around the world. Income and technology are brought to countries which are planned in the field of tourism and people were able to gain knowledge about other religious cultures (Tala & Padurean, 2008).

Tourist behaviour can be influenced by tourism and faith tourism; for example, destination and visitor product will be determined by the aim of the journey and also based on the form of tourism facilities that must be provided for tourists. Faith-based tourism or any other form of tourism is seeking customers and there should be competition for attracting more customers (Weidenfeld & Ron, 2008). The concept of faith tourism (pilgrimage) is described as "a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding" (Barber, 1993). However, nowadays this concept has been changed, and it consists of broader issues and is characterised in different forms and defined as modern and new secular travelling or traditional and old pilgrimage, and this kind of concept is experiencing a severe juvenescence all over the world (Digance, 2006). Today, a large number of people travel to holy places to achieve spiritual affection and a holy soul, and, interestingly, religious tourism is still known as the most concentrated form of tourism. For instance, Hind followers reach 70 million (Tala & Padurean, 2008). Muslim who gathered for the hajj ceremony in Saudi Arabia is approximately 3 to 5 million) and approximately 5 million people visit Lourdes in France (Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

The phenomenon of faith tourism (pilgrimage) is currently experiencing a resurgence throughout the world with longstanding shrines

still attracting those in search of spiritual fulfilment (Digance, 2003). Kosti (1998:5) notes, nevertheless, that pilgrimage (religious tourism) is boosting at a quick fee somewhat than lessening. In Europe, visitation to religious sites has been increasing while regular church attendance has been on the decline (Nolan and Nolan 1992). The popularity of spiritual trips may be found indeed not just in the boost of conscientiously inspired travelling to revered sites, but also in the combining of New Age devoutness with spiritual travelling (Rountree 2002). The concept of religion has switched along with the advancement of modern-day secularizing styles, such as post-industrialism, social pluralism, as well as medical reason (Baum 2000), which have, depending on some social analysts, led to decreasing importance of religious institutions as well as their associated practices (Houtman and Mascini2002).

The phrase "religion" is utilised in daily social discussion to recommend factors outside the world of traditional religious institutions. Williams (2002:603) suggests that the use of such terms in everyday vernacular "reflect[s] the deep penetration of New Age ideas of 'spirituality' into the culture" (Marler and Hadaway 2002).

Every year, thousands of individuals take a trip to significant pilgrimage destinations around the globe, both ancient and modern in origin. Jackowski (2000) estimates that approximately 240 million people a year go on pilgrimages. Conscientiously or even emotionally inspired travelling has come to be common as well as promoted in current years, taking up an essential segment of international tourism, and has expanded significantly in the latest years both in proportional and absolute terms. A continued increase in this market segment seems to be a foreseeable trend in the future as well (Bywater 1994; Holmberg 1993; Olsen and Timothy 1999; Post *et al.* 1998; Russell 1999; San Filippo 2001; Singh 1998).

According to Biblical profiles, sacred religious sites were visited by adherents and admirers or people who shared the same faith and fellowship while exploring the holy sites. Today, these religious sites have come to be part of the cultural landscape within their environments and also currently make up significant players in the tourist market; thereby, enhancing the economic condition of host communities. Cities like Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem, etc continue to attract millions of visitors yearly (Okonkwo 2015). Nigeria is a country with many different religions. The majority of the people are Muslims, but there is also a large Christian community and many different ethnic-religious communities. Thus, religious travels are important motivation today. Infant Jesus of miracle shrine is a Catholic site with the potential to attract religious tourists. This research emphasised the need to harness religious practices in Obanliku for religious tourism development.

Research Findings

The relevance of data presentation and analysis in the research process is underscored by the fact that it helps to predict or make inferences

about the preconceived notion that the researchers had concerning the population from which the data were collected. The statistic obtained through the process of presentation and analysis of the research data helps to confirm or refute the preconceived notion of the researchers about the situation, and this underlines the need for adequacy and propriety in data analysis as an incorrect general conclusion when what could have helped is specific and vice versa. Thus, the researchers shall endeavour to present a logical sequencing and adequate analysis of the research variables in other to help us arrive at some veritable inferences.

Ethnographic Result

The Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine is made up of several sections (sites) where people can pray, meditate, and worship their creator. Tourists visit the various sections based on their intents and purpose of visit. These sections are:

1. Mother Mary Gruto: People go to this site to ask mother Mary to intercede on their behalf, this place is built with a beautiful Mary statue and decorated with beautiful flowers. It is generally believed that people receive miracles after praying in the mother Mary Gruto.



Plate 1: Mother Mary Gruto

2. The Thirty Stones of Forgiveness: Here, to achieve spiritual affection, one is expected to suffer with Christ; thus, adherents and admirers are expected to climb the holy steps of grace forth and back) with their knees, while praying in different Jesus statues (a symbolic representation of the stations of the cross). It is believed that prayers made in this mood would ascend to heaven and answers received adequately.





Plate 2: The Thirty Stones of Forgiveness (The Holy Steps of Grace)



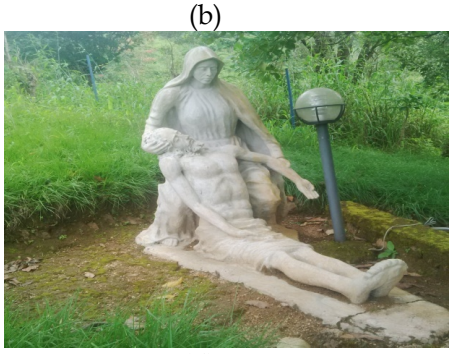
(a)



(b)



(b)



(d)

Plate 3(a-d): Different Stations of the Cross

3. Thanksgiving: This is the point where visitors/tourists go to thank their creator for answered prayers. There is also a miraculous chapel of the crib located up the mountain, after praying and suffering with Christ, one ends the prayers in the miraculous chapel where answers are easily gotten.




Plate 4: Prayer of Thanksgiving and Miraculous Chapel of the Crib

Statistical Result

The results of the data analyses were presented based on research questions.

Research Question One

What are the Economic impacts of tourists on businesses and the host community?

Table 1: Mean Ratings on the Economic Impacts of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine to Akorshi Community

S/N	ITEMS Business owners:	Respondents		
		$\overline{X}$	SD	REM
1	Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has increased the economic status of the business	3.11	0.80	**A**
2	There have been donations and grants to businesses from pilgrims as a means of support to the community	3.22	0.85	**A**
3	Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has influenced the kind of business situated in the community	2.73	1.09	**A**
4	There has been an increase in visitation since the establishment of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine	2.84	0.93	**A**
5	There has been a drift from a traditional belief system to a Christian believe	2.88	0.94	**A**
6	Businesses employ staff based on Christian faith	3.07	0.77	**A**
7	Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine provides humanitarian services like healthcare services, free food and clothes to the host community.	3.01	0.89	**A**
8	The frequent visit of people from different localities and beliefs has affected the belief of most youths	2.14	0.47	**DA**

$\overline{X}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Rem = Remark

The result in table 1 shows that the mean ratings of the business owners for item numbers 1-8 are 3.11, 3.22, 2.73, 2.84, 2.88, 3.07, 3.01 and 2.16 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.80, 0.85, 1.09, 0.93, 0.94, 0.77, 0.89 and 0.47 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree that the items in table one above are the economic impacts of faith-based activities in the Akorshi community.

Research Question Two

What are the economic impacts of Covid-19 on the hospitality and tourism industry in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Ratings on the Social Impacts of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine Activities in the Akorshi Community

S/N	ITEMS	Respondents		
		$\overline{X}$	SD	REM
9	There is social and economic development in Arkorshi attracted by the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine.	3.23	0.62	**A**
10	Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has affected the lives of the youths positively.	3.04	0.68	**A**
11	Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has helped in many Major developments in the Community.	3.15	0.14	**A**
12	Activities have impacts on the existing traditional practices in Arkorshi?	3.39	0.17	**A**
13	The influx of tourists to the site posed serious threat/damage to the host community/community's Resources.	2.24	0.23	**DA**
14	There has been a drift from traditional belief to Christian belief	3.18	0.18	**A**
15	Many workers lost their jobs when it was not the Christian celebration period	3.21	0.15	**A**
16	Many businesses are Christian related	2.91	0.16	**A**

$\overline{X}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Rem = Remark

The result in table 2 shows that the mean ratings of the business owners for item numbers 9-16 are 3.23, 3.04, 3.15, 3.39, 2.24, 3.18, 3.21 and 2.91 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.62, 0.68, 0.14, 0.17, 0.23, 0.18, 0.15 and 0.16 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree that items in table two above are the social impacts of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine on the Akorshi Community

Research Question Three

What are the measures to improve the socio-economic impact of faith-based tourism to Cross River State and Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Ratings on the Measures to Improve the Socio-economic Impacts of Faith-based Tourism to Cross River State.

S/N	ITEMS	Respondents		
		X	SD	REM
17	Advertise the site to increase visits during the pilgrimage	3.54	0.50	SA
18	Make accessible route for tourists to ease the stress on the site	2.98	0.61	A
19	Improve infrastructures and guest houses for visitors	3.14	0.18	A
20	Reduce visits to the site to retain authenticity and improve its holy state	2.01	0.32	DA
21	Build more sacred places to attract more Christians	3.21	0.17	A
22	Improve security around the site	3.64	0.42	SA
23	Seek government support in encouraging pilgrimage visits to the site for Christians and other believers	2.86	0.59	A
24	Encourage tour guiding to improve the experience and reduce time waste	3.31	0.16	A

X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Rem = Remark

The result in Table 3 shows that the mean ratings of the business owners for item numbers 17-24 are 3.54, 2.98, 3.14, 2.01, 3.21, 3.64, 2.86 and 3.31 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.50, 0.61, 0.18, 1.32, 0.17, 0.42, 0.59 and 0.16 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree that the items in table three above are the measures to improve the socio-economic impacts of Infant faith-based activities in the host community and Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings concerning research question one show that business owners and host community members have the same view on the economic impacts of faith-based tourism to Cross River State, They agreed that the economic impacts of faith-based tourism are the increase in the economic status of the businesses and improved living condition of the host community. This is in line with Secall (2003), that tourism is an option for enhancing lifestyle and for introducing positive changes in the distribution of income in poor regions. There have been donations and grants to

businesses from pilgrims as a means of support to the community. There has been a drift from a traditional belief system to Christianity, Also, there is an increase in visitation level since the establishment of Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine. The findings of the study further revealed that Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine provides humanitarian services like health-care services, free food and clothes to the host community. It also uncovered the understanding that frequent visits of people from different localities and beliefs have not affected the belief of most youths negatively

The findings concerning research question two show that business owners and community members have the same view on the social impacts of faith-based tourism on Cross River State. They agreed that the social impact of faith-based tourism to Cross River State cut across social and economic development in Arkorshi attracted by Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine. The shrine has affected the lives of the youths positively. The findings of the study further uncovered that Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has helped in much major development in the community, including impacts on the existing traditional practices in the Arkorshi, such that many traditional activities went extinct as it is seen as a sin to Christian belief, like sacrifices done during masquerade and new yam festivals, Nevertheless, the respondents disagree that the influx of tourists to the site posed serious threat/damage to the host community and community's resources.

The result of research question three shows that business owners and host community have the same view on the measures to improve the socio-economic impacts of faith-based tourism on the Nigerian economy. The measures include advertising the site to increase visitation during the pilgrimage, this would reach a large audience thereby creating awareness of the serene environment and testimonies of pilgrims would be shared to increase the faith of others and motivate travellers. Another measure is to create accessible routes for tourists to reduce stress on the site. This is one of many roadblocks to travel because people are motivated to travel when they can. This is consistent with the distance decay theory, which states that the farther away the destination site is, the less likely tourists will use it. Nonetheless, respondents agree that reducing visitor numbers to the site will not help to preserve its authenticity or improve its holy status because strategies are in place to accommodate such people and assist them in improving.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Faith-based Tourism on Obanliku

Most studies that measured the impacts of faith-based (pilgrimage) tourism explicitly agree that sacred destinations are strongly affected by the stream of faith-based tourists visiting them (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2006; Rinschede, 1992; Vukonic, 1996; Din, 1989; Walpole and Goodwin, 2000). The above assertion has been emphasised by Das Gupta (2006) when he posited that faith tourism plays a significant role in socio-economic changes. Tourism has played a vital role in the development of some rural zones that were

economically and socially depressed (Perales, 2002; Deller, 2009). Peripheral and rural areas have frequently looked to it as a tool for promoting local jobs and a pathway to rural regeneration and the diversification and restructuring of the rural economy (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Panyik, Costa, & Rátzl, 2011; Park & Yoon, 2009; Cawley & Gillmor, 2007).

Tourism is an option for enhancing rural lifestyles and for inducing positive changes in the distribution of income in poor regions. According to Secall (2003), the real perspective of interest brought about by faith-based activities has always been present in human history. As such, faith-based tourism can have enormous economic and social impacts as we see in other forms of tourism such as job creation, population growth, and infrastructure development.

The Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine is a pilgrimage site that attracts both national and international pilgrims and has affected the local population both socially and economically. It has changed the lifestyle of the youths making them more committed to the things which have reduced social vices. It has also changed their economic life drastically through the influx of faith-based tourist who comes to the site to give charity to the villagers via clothes, foodstuffs, and money, awarding scholarship to the children, and providing job opportunities for the youths. This shows that the host community has benefited so much both socially and economically from the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine. The positive impacts caused by tourists often motivate residents to seek the preservation of their religious sites and festivals not necessarily for religious reasons, but also to safeguard the accruing dividend as well as the stream of pilgrimage tourists (Cohen, 1992). As noted by Mc Grath (1999) the importance of faith (pilgrimage) travel as an economic, social and spatial phenomenon cannot be ignored.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) observed that faith tourism annually engages about 300 million passengers (pilgrims and visitors of sacred objects). 27% of tourist arrivals are for religious reasons, which were realized in 2012 (Tourism Highlights 2014:4). Das Gupta (2006) noted that faith tourism plays a significant role in economic changes. Cities like Lagos have experienced dramatic change due to religious activities in destinations like Synagogue Church of all Nations, Living Faith Church and Redeems Church of God.

The Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has vital and living experience in pilgrimage sites and has also become a famous destination because of the cultural identity and the heritage of the destination. The pleasure components are added to the common pilgrim routes and itineraries exemplified in the visit to the holy hill and the Gruto, the experience of a natural environment in the shrine, among others. Therefore, due to the continuous influx of pilgrims and tourists to this site, the economic life of the host community has been affected. Arguably, religious tourism has opened several sources of cash earning and as a result, several new occupations have been amended due to pilgrimage tourism (Shackley 2001). Faith-based

tourism reveals many perspectives on culture and economy (creation of job opportunities on the site). The villagers also expressed how the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has affected their lives, the community members are given major contracts like setting up of structures, they are given employment in the school owned by the shrine, and they also benefit from tourists rendering humanitarian services/charity like the distribution of food, clothes, and money.

With the influx of tourists, community members have the opportunity to sell sacraments like a rosary, holy oils and holy water to adherents and admirers of the religion as souvenirs. Tourists' spending, therefore, provides the necessary income for preserving and managing places of attraction. It should be noted that revenue generated from tourism is spread across different sectors indirectly related to the tourism industry. For instance, transportation, accommodation and communication would all benefit from a trip embarked upon by religious tourists. The importance of pilgrimage travel as an economic, social and spatial phenomenon cannot be ignored. Pilgrimage generates annual revenues of approximately $8 billion and over the past 30 years, Saudi Arabia has invested $35 billion in improving facilities for pilgrims (Salih, 2003). The result from the interview carried out in the study area shows that faith tourism has a significant impact on the local economy and the community has experienced more foreign and national visitors since its development. The site is still suffering from poor infrastructural development and a lack of government interventions; this site has attracted millions of tourists from different countries and states which has improved the lives of the people of Obanliku.

The Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has affected the social life of the host community and has increased their level of relationship with visitors. The miracle shrine has become very hospitable and has reduced many social vices in the community like stealing, fighting, cultism and gambling; and this has led to the youths of this community becoming more responsible. The shrine which is providing free education for children is also offering free computer training for youths which has broadened their horizons about the world and exposed them to the current trends and the digital age. It also offers free trips to educational sites for youths and children. According to Okpoko *et al.* (2008), the apparent implication of faith tourism is that many investors both within and outside the country would like to establish their enterprises there. Markets for tourists shopping, banks, and transportation facilities will be put in place for tourists to enjoy themselves.

Another implication is that religion and belief systems help to improve infrastructure and amenities in the host community where the religious tourism site is located. This is done through the establishment and maintenance of the existing access roads, electricity, healthcare delivery, and communication network. Again, faith tourism helps to promote peace and unity among host communities, states, and nations as it brings about an improvement in the quality of life for both urban and rural dwellers, through

the provision of leisure facilities and healthy relationships with others. Faith tourist has changed their spending habits; they are not as frugal as in the past (William, 2008). Today they spend more shopping than any other group of travellers (Bar and Cohen-Hattab, 2003). In Saudi Arabia, for example, religious travellers spend 75% of all tourist expenditures (Euromonitor, 2009). Also, many of these journeys are multifunctional; today many people attend pilgrimages out of curiosity and to find out more about unknown places (Josan, 2009).

Based on the two contemporary aspects we believe that the term "faith tourism" may be more appropriate to describe such journeys to religious sites. A pilgrim visits a religious site as part of his duty for being a faithful member of his or her religion or to fulfil a spiritual need (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a; Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). The use of the term "tourist", on the other hand, may suggest "pleasure" as a motive and seems to describe the situation better today as more and more people travel for both religious and recreational reasons (Shinde, 2007, Raj, 2008).

Enhancing Religious Tourism in Obanliku

For religious tourism to flourish and become a significant economic stronghold of Nigeria in the face of dwindling crude oil prices, the following recommendations should be adhered to by all tourism stakeholders.

Infrastructure is a crucial determinant factor that promotes arrivals in any tourism destination. Thus, improving infrastructure is essential to attract tourists to a destination (Phukani, Rahman and Devdutt, 2012). Transport infrastructure is an essential component of successful religious tourism development in that it induces the creation of new attractions and the growth of existing ones (as cited in Khadaroo and Seetanah, 2007). On the one hand, it affects arrival and tourism development whenever there is no development of transport infrastructure. On the other hand, it is fundamental for the development of other infrastructures in a particular destination; Arkorshi lacks the necessary infrastructure, there is no health centre in this community, no hotel around the destination, and the road is hilly and poorly maintained. This has contributed to reducing the number of tourists to the destination. Good access to roads and transportation networks among other tourism amenities can be achieved through collaborative efforts between government, non-governmental agencies and individual entrepreneurs interested in tourism development. To effectively achieve this, the government should create an enabling environment for collaborative efforts to thrive through tax reduction, and investment incentives, among others.

Government commitment to promoting religious tourism is yet to be felt. Other areas that need urgent interventions by the government are communication networks and affordable accommodation. For the study area to attract international tourists and be known beyond its immediate local boundaries, efforts should be made to develop roads leading to Obanliku

L.G.A, improve communication and make available standardised accommodation. These can be achieved through policy formulation and implementation as well as collaborations with other stakeholders.

Again, there are no tour guides on the site. It was also observed that tour operators are unaware of the destination site; hence, its absence in their packaged tours and advertisements. It should be noted that tour guides are versatile in the activities of the shrine and they educate religious tourists while exploring the attractions. Therefore, for tourists to have value for their money, efforts should be made to train tourist guides for the site and adequate awareness programmes should be mounted via radio/television programmes, documentaries, pamphlets, and posters. These would create much-needed awareness of the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine. As noted by Kauffmann (2008), active promotion can motivate tourist visit to a particular destination even if there is an infrastructural problem. Promotion becomes effective whenever a promotion is done by targeting the potential customers using appropriate Media.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to examine the socio-economic impact of faith-based tourism on sustainable tourism development in Nigeria; the study was carried out using the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine, Akorshi in Obanliku L.G.A. as a case study. The paper argues that the Infant Jesus of Miracle Shrine has a significant social and economic impact on the host community and that religion has a significant positive impact on tourism.

Literature related to the variables under the study was reviewed according to the hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The survey research design was adopted for the study, the aim of the design involves the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing phenomena;

Based on the findings of the study, strategies on how to enhance religious tourism in Obanliku were offered. The paper further argues that Obanliku is endowed with cultural, historical and natural values, which has tourism potential that can lead to the sustainable development of religious tourism if well harnessed.

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