Tourist Destination Choice: Motivational Factors Among Social Science Students’ Associations At KNUST

Lawrenca Pokuah Siaw
Lecturer, Department Of Geography And Rural Development, Kwame Nkrumah University Of Science And Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

Goodlet Owusu Ansah
Teaching And Research Assistant, Department Of Geography And Rural Development, Kwame Nkrumah University Of Science And Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
ABSTRACT

Understanding relationships between future behavioral intentions and its antecedents allow tourism operators to manipulate their tourism product offers to optimize customer satisfaction, and improve marketing efforts. Um and Crompton’s (1990) model of travel destination choice process was adopted as a conceptual framework to assess the various motivational factors influencing destination choices of student associations within the Faculty of Social Sciences at KNUST. The study revealed price and distance as important factors motivating destination choice among student groups.

Keywords: Travel motivation, Tourism planners, tourism operators, destination choice, tourism product, customer satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has a dramatic impact on the world’s economy and development. In fact, many countries and regions’ economies depend significantly on tourism generated revenue which exceeded $700 billion internationally in 2006. (LaMondia et al, 2009). For example, 3.9% of the GDP, 6.2% of Switzerland’s GDP, and over 11% of the European Union’s GDP are generated from tourism. However, the significance of recreational and leisure tourism extends beyond simply being a source of revenue: it provides substantial employment opportunities, influences regional infrastructure, supports local industry, contributes to traffic congestion, influences freight movements, and encourages urban development. Tourism in the African continent has been seen as a means of enhancing economic growth and development (Kester, 2003) as well as launching the image of the continent to the outside world (Olayinka and Gbadebo, 2007). As has been reported by UNWTO 2009, there has been significant growth (about 4%) in the level of international tourist arrivals in Africa despite the global economic crunch that has affected tourist arrivals to Europe and Asia negatively.

In an ideal world, tourism policy makers would be proactive about the growth and preservation of their industry, knowing what kind of travelers choose to holiday in their destinations and why travelers made this choice can help planners solidify demand for their current tourism services as well as expand and adapt services to attract new types of tourists depending on the changing values and preferences of holiday travelers. These shifts in traveler behavior in turn make predicting tourism demand very challenging (LaMondia, Snell and Bhat, 2009).

However, in spite of Africa’s potential in tourism, the continent’s tourism endowments have been underdeveloped and underutilized in its entirety. Africa in 2008 received about 46.9 million of the international tourist arrivals and got international tourist receipts of US$28.3 billion in 2007 which is very far
from what Europe, America and Asia received. Also, despite Africa’s potential in the tourism industry there are limited empirical studies on the issues concerning this hypothetical subject matter on the continent. This has necessitated the need for this study to add empirical data to the study of motivational factors to a tourism destination using student associations in the Faculty of Social Sciences-Kwame Nkrumah University of science and Technology as the focus sample population.

Christie and Crompton (2001) opined that, the lack of appropriate empirical studies on tourism in Africa has contributed to inadequate policy guidance to the industry. It is against this backdrop of gaps in empirical studies of tourism in Africa that this study is being conducted to contribute to knowledge in tourism and help to improving the impacts tourism generate at the destination.

This dissertation will purely be conducted based on literature review by reviewing and analyzing the projects and reports already written on similar topics. Tourism textbooks, journals, internet sources and internet reports will be the secondary sources to be reviewed. The key findings of this research project will aim at analyzing the motivating factors for tourist attraction destination choices using Social Science student associations on KNUST campus as a case study.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this research study is to assess the motivating factors of tourist destination choices using Social Science student associations of KNUST as a case study.

2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To identify destinations that are very popular to students on KNUST
- To examine the motivating factors of tourist destination choices
- To find out how choice of destinations are made for various student associations
- To identify challenges faced in the destination choice making process
- To assess the roles external stimuli play in destination choices

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Not much empirical work has been done on tourism in general and Ghana in part. Most studies in this regard are concentrated in developed and other regions elsewhere. Research has validated the position that a lot of factors influence the decision making processes of tourists in their destination choices. Many scholars in tourism research areas emphasize the areas of satisfaction of tourists, while few concerns about destination choice criteria. Destination choice determines how tourists choose their destinations (Scarpa and Thiene, 2005; Klenosky, Gengler, and Mulvey, 1993). Tourists have criteria for choosing their places to visit.
Understanding their criteria can help operators in tourism industry provide the appropriate information to meet the visitors’ expectations. There are several factors affecting choice criteria, including travel behaviors of the tourists. This research aims to discover and identify how students of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology make traveling decision. Another aspect of this study involves loyalty intentions of the tourists. Loyalty intention can suggest the possibility that the buyers will repurchase the products or services again. Currie, Wesley and Sutherland (2008) commented that studying tourism patterns of tourists leads to the understanding of factors affecting their patterns of decision making when choosing destination choices for traveling and such a study can further guide to the development of successful tourism promotion for tourists.

Cooper et al. (2004) systemizes the interrelated variables according to their purpose distinguishing: Energizers of demand, Effectors of demand, Roles and the decision-making process and Determinants of demand. Evidence copiously indicates that numerous factors influence tourist destination choice decisions. Among these factors with previous research emphasis include image of the destination, previous travel experiences, distance, social, cultural, personal, psychological, tourist’s self image, etc. (Wati, 2011; Phan-thi, 2010; Lee, 2009; Lam and Hsu, 2006; Prebensen, 2006; Bonn et al, 2005; Eilat and Einav, 2004; Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Money & Crotts, 2003; Weiermair, 2003; Ghen and Gursoy, 2003).

Um and Crompton (1990, p.435), conceptualized a model of a travel destination choice process into three (3) main categories; External inputs, cognitive construct and internal inputs. The model summarizes all the various stages a tourist undergoes before the final selection is made. It is upon this framework that the researcher based the study on to unravel the nuances of every decision making process within the tourism sector. On the other hand, Solomon et al, (2006) also summarized the whole decision making process by stressing that there are five (5) steps involved in any consumer buying process. (Solomon et al, 2006 p. 258)

4. DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

4.1 SETTING AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a quantitative approach to investigate the influential factors of tourist’s decision making in destination choices. The study involved undergraduate students from various departmental associations in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the Kwame Nkrumah university of Science and Technology. the participant’s characteristics included demographic variables (age, sex, marital status, nationality), educational variables (level of study, department of affiliation), tourism experience (previous experience, type of activity, information sources etc.).

4.2 SAMPLING AND STUDY PARTICIPANTS
The Faculty of Social Sciences was selected for the study based on its highly populated student numbers, its numerous departmental associations and varied cultural backgrounds of the population. To establish the requisite analysis in the factors that influence the decision making process during destination choice making, 10 distinct student associations were purposely selected from the 7 (seven) recognized departments for the study. For a meaningful conclusion to be made thereof, the study sample should have an affiliation to any of these departmental associations. Students from these associations were randomly selected (see table 1). The selection was based on availability of student at the Central Classroom Block. Those (mobile individuals) outside the faculty were excluded from the study to avoid the infusion of accidental samples.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION
Primary data were collected from students from the various student associations under the 7 (seven) departmental associations in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Face-to-face administered questionnaires were used in the primary data collection. This was done to avoid the problem of call backs, to improve respondent’s understanding of questionnaire items and to improve the response rate. For ethical consideration, informed consent was completed by each study participant who agreed to participate after the study objectives had been explained in English before fieldwork. Each participant was informed that participation was voluntary and assured of anonymity and confidentiality of information. They were all given the option of not participating in the study if they so wished.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS
Formal validation checks were performed before data entry in an electronic database and analyzed statistically through the SPSS software for Windows application programme (version 7). Descriptive statistics were carried out to describe baseline characteristics of respondents, sources of knowledge about attractions and destinations accessed and the frequency of trip organization. Data were organized and presented by frequency tables and proportionate counts.

This section contains the findings of the study after the analysis of data gathered from students within the various departmental associations in the Faculty of Social Sciences-K.N.U.S.T. Data was gathered through issued questionnaires and Focused group discussions by student leaders from the various departments and the results were analyzed using Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) Version 16.0. A total of hundred (100) questionnaires were issued; eighty (80) to general student within the faculty and twenty (20) to departmental executives(Student Leaders). All the questionnaires were issued out with each one of them being answered. The analysis took the form of descriptive statistics under various categories under investigation. The data indicate that majority of the respondents(58.8%) were females, a little less than 30% were in level 200 (first year) of study, 25% in level 200 and 300. A little higher than 21% were in level 400 in the Faculty of Social Sciences as shown on table 1. On the basis of marital status, 72 respondents indicating 90% were
single, 5 representing 6.2% were married, 2.5% were separated represented by only 2 respondents and finally, amongst the total 80 respondents, only 1 respondent was divorced. Students and executives agreed that, trips are organized mostly once in a semester. On the basis of nationality, out of the total 80 respondents, 93.8% representing 76 respondents were of Ghanaian descent whiles 2.5% representing 2 respondents were non-Ghanaians. This obviously supports the very location of the institution and therefore the likelihood that any student one meets is from a Ghanaian nationality. Details are shown in table 1.

The research finding reveals that the main motive of students upon arrival at the destination is purely for socializing purposes depicted by a total of 45% of respondents. This was followed by 37.5% of respondents showing interest in educational purposes upon arrival at the destination. This explains that irrespective of the reasons for joining association trips, avenues that make room for socializing is what respondents look for. Bearing in mind what has been established in terms of activities undertaken, respondents in their responses indicated that their main expectations in terms of activities are purely for study tours (the chance to gain more and new knowledge and ideas about phenomena; educational purpose-driven tourists). Thus, though most respondents have different reasons for joining association trips, their prior motive is to acquire knowledge; the opportunity to learn and study new things.

**4.4.1 THE INFLUENCE OF PRICE AND DISTANCE IN DESTINATION CHOICES**

The study again revealed that, the major influential factors that motivate students in their decisions to partake in an organized trip were; willingness to pay for organized trips and the distance involved. This means that, irrespective of how standardized and appealing accommodation facilities at the destination were, and attractions at the destinations, students were not concerned. Thus, the distance involved in the travel and their willingness to pay (price charges) were their major concerns. Eugenio-Martin (2003) stated that tourists may decide to travel based upon income (Availability of funds to pay) and preferences of each person. Therefore, as indicated in table 1.0, prices charged is a critical tool that influences the decision making process of tourists. Without discretionary income alone, a tourist cannot embark on any travel. Thus, any or both elements are pertinent prerequisite for travels to be undertaken (Lim, 1997). Therefore, the presence of these two favourable conditions were enough grounds for them to buy into an organized trip package.

Moreover, previous travel experience influences the decision making process in destination choices. Thus, respondents are willing to revisit attractions that have positive impacts, more and interesting activities on offer etc. which helps to improve the image of the destination.

From the data, all 80 respondents affirmed the influence of the image of a particular destination. Thus, the positive or negative image associated with a particular destination’s accommodation, host reaction to visitors, nature of attraction at the destination etc. thus, a destination tagged with negative attributes attract less visitors whiles destinations with positive attributes will continue to appeal to new visitors whiles encouraging repeat
visits. Also, with satisfaction levels in terms of prior advertisement of trips, 60% of respondents were not satisfied. On the other hand, 35% of respondents were satisfied. The remaining 5% took a neutral stance.

4.4.2 POPULAR DESTINATIONS AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCES DESTINATION CHOICE

Again, it came out that Kakum National Park, Cape Coast Castle, Afadjato, Kintampo waterfall are the major tourist attractions popular to students. In that same context, Greater Accra, Ashanti, Volta, Western and Eastern regions were the most popular regional destinations for student organized trips. A little above 72% of respondents indicated the possibility of future visits to the already visited sites as seen in figure 1. This finding is in tandem with the finding of Baker and Crompton, (2000), visitors perception of high performance quality increases the level of satisfaction which in turn, influences behavioral intentions and raises the probability of repeat visits and the spread of positive word-of-mouth (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

Accommodation and quality food at the destination were significant factors that influence the ranking decisions of students in exercising destination choice decision processes. This means that, an attraction with good and standardized accommodation and good food for visitors, influence their positive attachment to the site/attraction, others showed desire for serenity and accessibility reasons, as well as the unique tourism products offered at the destination. Most respondents did not like the least ranked attraction due to poor road and transportation networks (issue of accessibility), poor accommodation facilities and low quality food for visitors. Some sites demanded a lot of energy such as climbing, long safari walks without any attractive scene, high prices of commodities or goods at the destination markets, poor organization, mosquito bites and poor reception at the destination were some of the pressing issues raised and therefore found destinations with these unpleasant conditions unattractive to visit.

4.4.3 SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT ATTRACTIONS

The findings of this work revealed that word of mouth is a very significant source of information ‘catching’ and this is represented by a little less than 70% of respondents as shown in figure 2. This finding is greatly supported by previous studies showing the various information collection about destination visitations which are related to visitor’s actions and choices, but word of mouth seemed to be the basic source of information for many visitors especially from friends and family (Murphy et al, 2007).

Also, the findings revealed that a total of 71.2% of respondents representing 57 stated that, their previous visit influences their decision to join a particular trip or otherwise. A little less than 30% of respondents stated that previous visits do not influence their decision to joining organized association trips. This is in tandem with Morwitz (1997), who suggests consumers with previous experience can make accurate predictions of whether or not to engage in the same behaviour in the future, than those with no such previous experience. Educational reasons tend to cloud the decision of students in terms of their reason for visiting certain attractions as
indicated by 62.5% of respondents representing 50 students followed by 31.2% skewed to the desire for pleasure and 6.2% showing other reasons apart from the ones stated.

4.4.4 CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENT EXECUTIVES IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

From the study carried out, 40% of respondents indicated that inadequate finance for association trips is the major challenge faced followed by time constraint representing 30%, lack of interest by students representing 15%, other challenges herein not stated and means of transport according to respondents indicate 10% and 5% respectively. This is in tandem with the findings of Leisen (2001), who claims that visitor's choices about destinations are related to their financial and time allocation. Also, a popular framework, the Traditional Leisure Paradox model, presented by Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd, and Wanhill (1998), graphically portrays the conventional wisdom of the relationship between the independent variables of discretionary time and discretionary income with the dependent variable travel frequency.

All respondents (20) representing 100% agreed that some factors are considered when selecting a particular tourist destination and that these factors help 19 of the respondents representing 95% to prepare a list of attractions from which final selection is made. This therefore means that, the destination choice process as put forward by Um and Crompton (Um and Crompton, 1990) is authenticated by the data gathered.

5. CONCLUSION

From this research conducted, and using only a quantitative research as Fitzpatrick et al, (1998) suggested, it can be concluded that there are some significant factors that trigger visitors to choose a particular destination. There are striking evidence that the development of a country and visitor’s personal exposure to diverse ideas have strong drive towards destination choices. The main focus of this study captured destination choice criteria. Tourists have criteria for choosing their places to visit. Understanding their criteria can help operators in the tourism industry to provide the appropriate information to meet the visitors’ expectations. There are several factors affecting choice criteria, including travel behaviors of the tourists.

This research discovered and identified how students within the Social Sciences Faculty of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology make traveling decision. Currie, Wesley and Sutherland (2008) commented that studying tourism patterns of tourists leads to the understanding of factors affecting their patterns of decision making in destination choices for traveling and such a study can further guide to the development of successful tourism promotion for tourists. Findings from the study has proven that indeed some factors influence the decision making process of tourists. Thus, the previous travel experience, situational factors, image of a tourist destination, external and personal characteristics etc. have a significant influence on the decision making process of tourists.
Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggested the following recommendations: Transportation is an essential part of the tourism industry and it plays an important role as well. Without it, travelling would be impossible. So is how important is for the road leading to the attraction should be constructed in order to facilitate tourist movement to the area. The government should improve the transportation facilities in the area by providing the area with good road network. Also, based on the findings of the study, adequate advertisement is very important so trip planners should put in more efforts in the advertisement of trips so that patronage could be increased. Affordable charges of association trips, active involvement by Lecturers, and improvement in tourism infrastructure can also help improve the appeal and invariably the patronage of organized association trips.

Moreover, students consider their willingness to pay for a particular package as an essential factor that influences their decision to join a trip or otherwise. It is therefore pertinent that much attention be paid to giving students value for money. Thus, planners should consider the various marketing concepts especially; the Selling Concept which holds that consumers will not buy enough products of the company unless it embarks on a large scale selling and promotion effort and the Product Concept which has to do with the idea that consumers will favour products that offer the most quality, performance and features, and that the organisation should focus on making continuous product improvements. Finally, trip planners must emphasize more on printed hard copies of posters, flyers, banners, stickers etc. if they want to actively improve the publicity and overall patronage of their trips.

6. REFERENCES
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In text reference: (Solomon et al, 2006)

In text reference: (Um & Crompton, 1990)

In text reference: (UNWTO, 2007)

### 7. TABLES AND FIGURES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>General Students</th>
<th>Total Responses n(%)</th>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Attractions at the destination</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Activity engaged in at the destination</td>
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<td>Socializing</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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*Table 1.0 Characteristics, factors of influence and activities engaged in by tourists*

*Source: Field Work, 2014*
Figure 1.0 Popular attractions mostly visited by students
Source: Field Work, 2014

Figure 2.0: Source of information about attractions
Source: Field Work, 2014

Figure 3.0 Major factors influencing decision making process
Source: Field survey, 2014