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An Assessment of the Effects of Social Conflicts on Tourism in Plateau State Nigeria (Case Study of Jos Crisis on Hill Station Hotel)

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Abstract
This research assesses the effects of social conflicts on tourism products in Plateau State. It was specifically set out to find out the major causes of social conflicts in Jos, evaluate the effects of social conflicts on the influx of tourists to Hill station hotel Jos, and the impact on revenue generation of the hotel. To achieve these objectives research questions were formulated and a sample of 30 hotel staff was selected as the respondents. Data collected were organized and analyzed using tables, percentages and mean statistics. It was found that the hospitality and tourism industry was adversely affected. The crisis brought about decline in the number of tourist arrivals, increase in cancelled bookings, decrease in the average length of stay of tourists and the average room occupancy. Peace is the best friend of travel and tourism, while war and insecurity are among its worst enemies. It is recommended that all stakeholders involved in tourism administration should device safer environment that supports continued patronage by providing modern security apparatus. In the same spirit, government as the main stake holder in security provision should do more than paying lip service to guarantee security and safety of lives and properties.

1. Introduction

The increasing social conflicts in the parts of Northern Nigeria are prevalent in Kano, Kaduna, Benue, Taraba, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and Bauchi states. The first episode of mass violence in Jos, Plateau State was the anti-Igbo pogroms of 1966. In 2001, a similar one re-occurred (Ambe-Vva 2010). From its inception as a colonial country, Nigeria had faced different types of social conflicts of regional or state dimensions, which have frequently challenged its effort at national unity, democratization and economic transformations ((Adora, 2010)

The unfortunate and recurrent social conflicts in Plateau state which could have been nibbled in the bud by government in good time, gradually went out of control and took a very horrible dimension. The crisis claimed lives of many people, including innocent citizens passing by and a staggering amount of private and public property. This could be likened to the former Rwanda massacre (Mohammed, 2012). Plateau state is the noticeable site of ethnic and religious violence in northern Nigeria with reoccurring records of crisis across the entire state (Higazi, 2011). Plateau state is known as the home of peace and tourism for its beautiful climate and friendly people. The state, until the upsurge of mayhems, attracted both domestic and international tourists throughout the

year. It is a plural society per excellence, characterized by diversity and complexity where major political issues are vigorously and violently contested along ethnic, religious and regional boundaries (Shehu 2012). Furthermore issues that generate the violent contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner take all strategies. These include the control of the state power, resource allocation and citizenship. Consequently, the state tends to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart (Adora 2010)

The issues of indigeneship, ethnicity and religious fanaticism are so difficult to check and they are the major causes of most crises in Nigeria, Higazi (2011) identifies over 30 ethnic groups in Plateau state.

2. Conceptual Framework

Henslin (2009) states that social conflicts result to various social problems in the society such as civil disorder, protest, war, arson, among others. Malesevic (2010) describes social conflict as an activity found in every society in this world, and is considered as an important study for social science. Based on this context, many researchers have contributed to the study of social conflicts among individuals such as conflicts among families, religious and tribal group and conflicts among states, religions and countries. Adeyemo (2000) defines crisis as a situation where there is a perception of threat, violence and the belief that any action will have far-reaching consequences, affecting individuals, groups, communities or the society. Crises are deemed to be negative changes in the security, economic, political, social and environmental affairs, whenever they occur with little or no warning. Kayode, Oyejida and Soyode (2005) describe, crisis as a set of rapidly unfolding events which raise the impact of destabilizing forces in general system which increases the likelihood of violence occurring in the society.

Crisis is regarded by some as a turning point in any relationship and is a less common phenomenon than conflict. The crisis period covers the formulation of the challenge, the definition of the issue as well as the decision on the appropriate reaction of the challenge. Crisis is the highest stage of a conflict being indeed the escalation of uncontrolled or poorly-managed conflicts.

The understanding of crisis in Nigeria recently has been so terrifying that the prospect of Nigeria as a nation is the issue that occupies the mind of many people (within and outside the country). The foreign speculations about the break of Nigeria before 2015 show that the cankerworm of ethnicity can do more harm than good. However political conflicts could be as the results of personal interests or party interests for political positions, Political conflicts in Nigeria, have been the catalyst of instability, where basic functional social order and

peacefulness are disrupted (Ajayi 2012).Furthermore the break-up of the then four regions in Nigeria into states and local government areas in 1967 and the multiplication of political units have accentuated ethnic and sub-ethnic political demands. This results to minority-majority relations and generates inter-communal conflicts.

Contributing, Laura (2012) points out that, 2011 presidential election in Nigeria resulted to protest and demonstration which turned violent and many people lost their lives and properties worth millions of naira. When crises occur, tourism and hospitality industry is worst affected because it is entirely people - oriented. Ajayi (2012) observes that Nigeria as a nation is responsible for the country's ethno-religious crisis because of differences in tribes, religion, culture and tradition. These differences have resulted to frequent feeling of distrust and hatred among different groups and have created fear of one group domination. According to Malesevic (2010), it is obvious in a plural society like Nigeria, that the social structure is inherently prone to generate conflicts from diverse ethno-linguistic group, social culture interest groups and political and economic settings. Daily sun, the Guardian and News watch of 18 March, 2004 published the various types and dates of social conflicts in Nigeria. These forms of social conflicts as well as political instability have adverse influence on the images of tourist destinations or attractions. The negative images that are projected due to social conflicts are difficult to dislodge even after the conflicts; as such their negative effects on the tourism and hospitality industry linger for long (Pizman and Mansfeld 2006). Wang and Pizman (2011) opine that arbitrary acts of social conflict decrease travel activities and remain so until the public retentions of the exposed cases fade. The effect of crisis can be enormous even in a developed economy. In a study of the negative effects of the September 2001 Al'Qaeda air strikes on the U.S by Adam and Sinclair (2002), it was observed that the effects of the strikes stretched beyond the activities that were directly connected with tourism to other related sectors and stakeholders such as aviation, hospitality, suppliers of intermediate goods and services, and investors in the tourism industry. Page and Connell (2006) support that eruption of crisis is capable of driving away tourists and slowing down revenue generation of tourist destinations and of the region.

Adejoh and Fada (2014) highlighted some of the negative impacts of crises on the tourism as decline in the number of tourist arrivals, loss of revenue , decrease in the average length of stay of tourist, increased military or armed police force presence and increased fear and uncertainty among tourism entrepreneurs. Additionally, many countries of the world experience significant drops in tourists' arrivals, revenue generation and poor tourism development due to social conflicts of any nature. Holland (2008) reported that Kenyan tourism industry suffered significantly because of violence that followed a presidential election - foreign exchange earnings dropped to 54% in 2008, tourists arrivals fell to 45%, while room occupancy rates dropped to an average of 30%, compared to previous year of 86%. Essner (2003) reported

that Kenya economy lost about 12% of its annual GDP as a result of bombing of the U.S.A embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and the Beach hotel in Mombasa in 2003. Tunisian tourism has considerably declined in 2011 because of revolutionary strides. As observed by Ammar (2011), the number of tourists visiting Tunisia declined by 34.4% and the income generated by tourism dropped by 38.5%. Tourism represents 6% of Tunisia's total economy; 20% of Tunisia's exports and 12% of total employment. Actually, peace and security play a major role in making travel choices.

Henslin (2009) stresses the symbiotic relationship between peaceful atmosphere and tourism development in a destination. Evidences exist that the absence of terror or violence along with related factors is usually a pre-condition generally accepted for the development of destinations. Adejoh and Fada (2014) support that destinations are less attractive to tourists and investors whenever there are insecurity and fear of conflict. Thus, wars, political unrests, insurgency, violation of human rights and insurrections affect tourism destinations no matter the magnitude of such crises. This supports the opinion of Adeyemo (2000) who emphasizes that tourism is vulnerable to chaos and can flourish only in a peaceful environment

3. Methodology

An exploratory research method was adopted in assessing the effects of social conflicts, on tourism practice in Plateau State, with a focus on Hill Stations Hotel, Jos. A survey design was adopted to get the opinion of individuals handling the affairs of the hotel. This strategy follows the opinion of Kumar (2005) who recommends survey as an adequate approach for exploratory research.

Structured, close-ended questionnaire, drawn on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree), was used for obtaining the primary data. The issues raised in the questionnaire pertained to likely reasons for incessant social conflicts in Plateau state, how social conflicts affect tourism industry in Plateau state, and impact of crises on occupancies at the Hill Station Hotel. A sample of 30 respondents was randomly selected from among the staff and guests of the Hill Station Hotel. In addition to the primary data, news items, newspaper reports, and conference proceedings provided reliable secondary sources of data for this write up. Primary data collected were organized in tables and percentages of each group of responses in relation to maximum expected result determined and this forms the basis for discussions and deductions

4. Findings and Discussions

The causes of frequent conflicts and crises in Plateau State are both socio-cultural and political. Over 60% of the respondents link the situation to religious bigotry, sectional marginalization and political power struggle among the major ethnic formations. Right from ages, the history of communities shows their survival through wars and battles. It

is not out of place for Tyoden (2003) to assert that social conflict is fuelled when the balance of power between groups changes or , perhaps, when one group abuses their power, wants more power or fears losing their power, or even challenges those in power in order to improve the balance of power.

But where strife rages, tourism is at greater disadvantage since its sustenance and propensity to flourish depend on people traffic. It was observed by 56.75% of respondents, strongly agreeing (x = 4.6, SD = 0.65), that the incessant crises in Jos metropolis and the suburbs contribute to state of fear and uncertainty among people, which in turn decrease travel activities [see Table 1]. Other factors like economic depression are of minor effects. Consequently, hotel occupancies are low due to cancellation of bookings and change to new destinations by regular tourists to the state.

Table 1. Factors Affecting Tourist Arrivals and Occupancies.

	x	SD
Incessant crises	4.61	0.65
Economic depression	3.72	1.01
Poor services offering	2.95	0.89
Inadequate promotional activities	2.44	1.11
Government taxes	2.32	1.02

The profit level depends greatly on the volume of trade and so, decline in the number of tourist arrivals with attendant low room occupancy exerts much negative impact on realization of profit objective. This explains the reasons why economists criticize social conflicts as unhealthy for economic development in many developing countries. For example, Abdullahi (2011) describes the Egypt 1994 terrorist attacks as a blow to the Egyptian economy, most especially the tourism industry.

The multiplier effects of this will extend to related service providers such as aviation, suppliers of intermediate goods and services, tourism investors and the communities and government that derive their revenue from tourism. This research supports the idea of Adam and Sinclair (2000) who view the effect of crises on tourism beyond the immediate destruction of lives and property. Acts of social conflict curtail travel activities and may remain so until the public memories of the publicized incidents fade.

Examining the negative impact of insecurity on Jos Hill Station Hotel as the oldest and most popular in Jos, it is revealed that there have been persistent decline in tourist arrivals, length of stay by guests and revenue generation for the period 2011 – 2013.(See Fig 1). This trend can only be gradually reversed when lasting peace returns to the state known and called 'Pearl of Tourism'

Managers and supervisors at the Hill Station Hotel strongly agree (x = 4.81) that tourism and hospitality business in Plateau State was better in the past (see Table 2) than what is presently obtainable and the cause is more of security incidents than economic factor.

Table 2. Comparative Occupancies, 2011 – 2013.

	x	SD
Occupancies in 2011 were higher than in 2012 and 2013	4.81	0.96
Occupancies in 2012 were higher than in 2011 and 2013	3.43	1.22
Occupancies in 2013 were higher than in 2011 and 2012	2.19	0.74
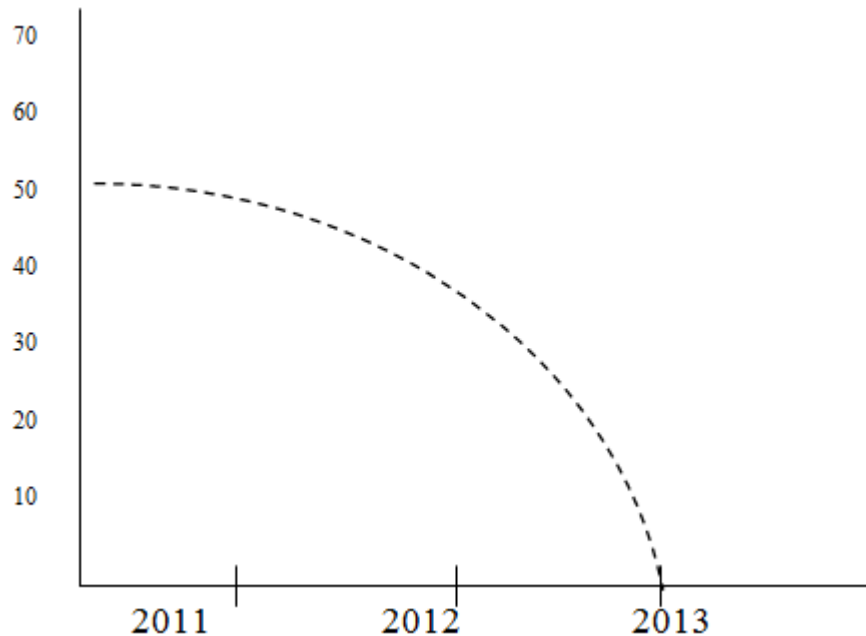
Fig. 1. Record of Booking and Length of Stay, Jos Hill Station, 2011 – 2013.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Crisis has drastically and negatively affected all the sectors that constitute the tourism industry in Plateau State, particularly the hotels and tourist attractions in Jos. The tourism industry is very important in the creation of means of livelihood for many – the individuals, the communities and governments. However, security of lives and properties is what will attract both the tourists and investors in the industry.

The role of the tourism and hospitality industry should be appreciated by all so as to avoid attack and destruction directed at tourism products

Religious leaders, traditional and community rulers must vote for peace and use all available machinery and youth development programmes to avert further escalation of crisis on the Plateau. They should also prevail on the people to resort to dialogue as the best option for conflict resolution in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

Government can use political will and legislative machinery to address insurgencies and insurrections. Protection should be granted hotels and tourist attractions in time of crisis so as to restore the confidence of tourists.

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