Promoting Tourism Potential of Southern Nigeria on Facebook by Tourism Boards

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Abstract

This study investigated the Tourism Boards' use of Facebook to promote tourism in Southern Nigeria. Three research questions were stated to guide the study. The content analysis method was used to carry out the study. The period of study was one year, from June 2019 to May 2020. The population of the study was the whole posts on the Facebook pages of all the 17 Tourism Boards of the 17 states in Southern Nigeria. The researchers randomly selected three states' Tourism Boards from each of the three geopolitical zones that make up Southern Nigeria. The units of analysis covered photographs, texts, videos, and web links from the administrator of the Page. Data presentation/analysis was done using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings of the study showed that Lagos and Ondo States' Tourism Boards do not have a Facebook page presence. It was further found out that Edo and Enugu States Tourism Boards have the most active Facebook pages on tourism. The study also found out that art, culture, and promotional activities were the most shared and commented tourism activities within the period under study. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended sustained enlightenment on the benefits of promoting tourism activities on Facebook among the Southern Nigeria Tourism Boards and the residents of the region.

Keywords: *Tourism, Facebook page, Rural development, Promotion*

Background

In many countries of the world, including Nigeria, there exists a developmental gap between the rural and the urban areas. While the urban dwellers continue to get the basic necessities of life such as secure jobs, education, security, medical care, and high income, the rural areas are outside of the state's budget (Whyte, 2010). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 1980 declaration states that "tourism can contribute to the establishment of a new economic order that will help to eliminate the widening economic gap between developed and developing countries and ensure the steady acceleration of economic and social development of the developing countries". The foregoing suggests that tourism has the power to cause a redistribution of income between the urban and the rural parts of a country. Sharpley (2015: p.7) views tourism as

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"an effective source of income and employment; for example, in the Maldives, about 26% of the workforce is employed directly in tourism and a further 27% indirectly".

Tourism is an intangible product or service that people patronize through travel, recreation (holiday making), and sightseeing. Tourism involves traveling for leisure and people visiting a place they have heard, seen, or read about. Stories sell tourism and touristic activities. Beeton (2005) states that "most of the great pilgrimage and tourism sites were established through the written media"(p.4) such as books, newspapers, and magazines. However, the television's debut, no doubt, has caused a serious boom in the tourism business. On this, Beeton (2005: p.4) notes that "from the mid-20th century, film (and later television) became the main mass medium outlet and has been particularly effective in promoting tourism. Media such as literature and film can provide a wealth of meaning, real or imagined".

The mass media, through sustained reportage and representation, have the power of creating awareness about the existence of a site, art, festival, or activity and equally create the need for people to visit, patronize or buy into it. In other words, the media induces interest in the way tourism is presented to the audience. This media-induced tourism has more than doubled since the advent of the internet and social media particularly. Cloke (2006: p.19) claims that "the Internet is urbanizing the rural areas through the dissemination of information to the urban areas; that is, it is globalizing the local and localizing the global". Beeton (2005: p.9) subsequently, observes that "film (media)-induced tourism is one-time or recurring events of limited duration developed to primarily enhance the awareness appeal and profitability of destination with the sole aim to create interest and attract attention"

The internet and, by extension, social media, have provided the ordinary person the opportunity to tell stories with videos, texts, and pictures. Sharing photographs, videos, and information on events can expose the community's attractions to tourists and subsequently create a strong desire in tourists to visit the place talked about. Cloke (2006: p.18) observes that "the Internet is promoting tourism and citizen journalism (social media) is disseminating tourism messages and cultural artifacts faster to the ordinary people through mobile phones". It is through mobile phone devices that many people access Facebook today. Facebook Page has provided many organizations and groups the opportunity of showcasing what they have or marketing their products or services.

Realizing the importance of social media in marketing tourism, the Director-General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), Folorunsho Folarin-Coker, has said that "the marketing of Nigerian tourism is better driven via the platform of the new technologies provided by the social media" (Babatunde, 2017). Nigeria as a country has the potentiality of earning so much from tourism. As the most populous black nation with over 270 languages, ethnic groups, and cultures, the country stands out as a tourists destination. Even within the country, the rural areas have some natural endowments, friendly climate, and rich flora and fauna that can attract the urban dwellers as well as foreigners to experience. Similarly, there are many museums across the country that can spin money. But the discovery of oil in a commercial quantity in the country in 1956 led to the abandonment of all other avenues of foreign earnings including agriculture and tourism. Economists have warned about the danger of a mono-product economy of oil and gas. The government of Nigeria, in a bid to diversify the economy, is now looking at the direction of tourism as a way out because of the gains countries like South Africa, Israel, and Kenya among others are making. In 1992, the government enacted an Act to

establish a Tourism Development Corporation. The Act subsequently mandates states to establish tourism boards. The work of the manager of these state boards is to create the need for tourists to visit their facilities as a source of income for the states and the nation respectively.

The aim of this study is to find out if the government is employing Facebook as a medium for advertising and promoting the country's tourism potential as the Director-General of the country's Tourism Corporation claims. The specific objectives of the study include to: find out if Tourism Boards in Southern Nigeria have a Facebook presence; find out if states' Tourism Boards display tourist sites on their Facebook pages to create awareness about the existence of such sites; identify the aspect of tourism each state shows on Facebook Page and finally, to ascertain the aspect of tourism people (fans) appreciate the most on Facebook Pages of the Tourism Boards.

Rural Tourism and Rural Development
Tourism is a multifaceted and universal industry. Tourism involves traveling out of one's location for sightseeing, holiday-making, fun, and recreation. Rural tourism is an aspect of tourism which de-emphasizes mass tourism, but requires, in the views of Telfer and Sharpley (2003:p.115), "greater local control and integration of tourism into the local economy through the use of local labour, products, and resources, with the aim to contribute to the broader notions of development such as empowerment and greater self-reliance". Telfer and Sharpley (2003: p.116) note that "not only should tourism development protect and enhance cultural heritage and environment; local residents also need to have input in the tourism planning process and greater participation in the benefits of tourism".

Rural tourism equally goes with names such as local or community-based tourism. The distinguishing feature of this type of tourism from others is that it is located in rural areas and controlled by rural dwellers. Beeton (2006: p.142) submits that rural tourism is "a multi-faceted activity that can include nature-based recreational activities and community attractions as well as farm-related tourism". The community should be involved and affected by rural tourism.

Some prominent aspects of rural tourism include, but are not limited to the following:

Cultural tourism: Cultural tourism is always motivated by people's inclination to learn about other people's ways of life. As cited by du Cros and McKercher (2015: p.4) cultural tourism is described by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "the movement of persons to cultural attractions with the intention to gather new information and experience to satisfy their cultural needs". Cultural tourism has to do with marketing the natural or created culture of a people or place which has not been influenced by the forces of modernization. Such cultural tourism aspects that attract people include arts, dance, museums, crafts, drama, and festivals among others. Today, festivals as an aspect of cultural tourism appear to be reinvented, revived, and repositioned in the form of carnivals to attract visitors. Corroborating this, Picard and Robinson (2006: p.3) observe that "festivals merely form a part of and are used to support the overall cultural offer of a destination". Tourists buy some locally made crafts and arts as souvenirs during such visits.

Agritourism: In the 10th World Agritourism Day, the United Nations World Tourism Organization notes that "agritourism is a form of sound environmental sustainable and

socially responsible tourism development, which has the potential to contribute substantially to local socio-economic development and poverty reduction". George and Rilla (2011: p.3-4) note that "agritourism is a business conducted by farmers or ranchers on their working agricultural or horticultural operation for the enjoyment and education of visitors". Similarly, Awan, Saeed and Zhuang (2016: p.8) see agritourism as "visiting a working agricultural setting (usually a farm or ranch) for leisure, recreation or educational purposes". Agritourism is one of the measures to increase farmer's income by selling certain seedlings or species of domestic animals to visitors.

Ecotourism: This is a short form for ecological tourism. Ecotourism involves traveling to a natural and unpolluted environment for sightseeing, holiday making, or environmental education. Gale and Hill (2009: p.4) note that "ecotourism involves travel to a natural area involving local people, and contributing to the maintenance of the local environment and species through minimizing visitor impact on the facilities and promoting tourist education". To Wearing and Neil (2009: p.131) "ecotourism is much about environmental education, the fostering of attitudes and behaviour that is conducive to maintaining the natural environment and empowerment of host communities".

Whichever aspect of rural tourism, Mitchell and Hall (2005: p.5) observe that "the very essence of rural tourism is local cooperation and community involvement through appropriate forms of networking". This will naturally lead to the springing up of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) around the community. "It is estimated that more than two-and-a-half million SMEs are involved in the tourism industry in Europe with 81.5% of these actually falling into the micro category" (Mitchell and Hall, 2005). The sprouting up of small industries in rural areas across a country is seen as the bedrock of national development. Mahatma Gandhi had written long back in 1936 in Harijan saying "I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities, but in its 700,000 villages...I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too" (Singh K, 2009). Gandhi favoured village-based decentralized development where the masses cause employment through cottage industries leading to self-sufficiency.

Facebook and Exposition of Tourism Activities
The upgrade of the internet to web 2.0 has given birth to social media. Solis and Breakenridge (2009) in describing social media observe that social media are the democratization of content and the shift in the role people play in the process of communication (that is, creating and sharing content). They state that social media are empowering people to become new influencers. Social media has a lot of interactive channels such as, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Blog, 2go, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and many others through which people communicate, share experiences, and network.

Facebook has been recognized as the most popular social media (Claussen et al., 2013). It has transformed virtually all human activities including tourism. Facebook operates on three levels, namely – Profile, Group, and Page. Facebook pages are always owned and maintained by corporate organizations as an advertising and promotional tool. Prenson (2011) notes that "companies use fan (Facebook) pages to increase sales". Slivar (2009: p.52) observes that "since the primary purpose of Facebook is socialization, it makes it unrealistic to expect direct sales from Facebook product promotion, but rather the expansion of brand awareness". In the same vein, Facebook equally expands the

avenues through which customers/consumers acquire knowledge about tourist attractions and their locations.

Herman Cheng, the Chief Executive Officer of <u>FunShare</u> while commenting on the powers of Facebook in business promotion notes that "Facebook gives us a platform where we can enhance our brand presence, build a user community and convert these users into paying customers. That's unique and powerful" (Facebook, 2019). Many Nigerians are on Facebook and get connected through their smartphones. The advent of smartphones has given social media an unimaginable boost and penetration into the even remotest rural areas. Smartphones can best be described as miniaturized computer systems. Dickinson, Ghali, Cherrett, Speed, Davies, et al (2014: p.84) note that "smartphones combine a cellular telephone with built-in applications and Internet access. Digital voice service is combined with text messaging, email, web browsing, portable media players, low-end compact digital cameras, pocket video cameras, and GPS navigation".

With all these devices, promoting tourism on Facebook and other social media is now made a lot easier. Tourists share experiences either on the Facebook Page of the tourism board or on other social media platforms, thereby expanding the awareness of certain tourism sites. This supplements the advertisement and marketing of the sites by the tourism managers. Facebook is good for "promoting tourism through appealing visual imagery, colours or people engaging with places or activities in a way which produces an empathetic response, a feeling of shared identity" (McCabe, 2009: p.212).

Theoretical framework
This study is anchored on the hierarchy of effects theory/model. This theory was developed by Lavidge and Steiner in 1961. The theory posits that consumers move from a stage of total disinterest to eager purchasers – through a sequence of steps until purchase. These steps involve unawareness of the brand's existence; awareness; consumers preference for the brand over others (a favourable affective predisposition); a desire to purchase the brand and conviction that it would be a wise purchase that leads to purchase intent, and finally making in the actual purchase (behavioural attitude component) (Deffet, 2014).

> For easy buying decision making, consumers must be provided with factual information about a product and this information will affect their emotions by creating likeness and eventual preference for the brand in question. Vitale (2006) writes that reinforcement of preference at the point of purchase will create conviction of the brands' desirability leading to purchase. In summary, the hierarchy of effects model involves (a) presentation of rational facts and features to create desire or liking (b) emotional reactions, and (c) action of making a purchase (Vitale, 2006). This theory/model shows that as the tourism boards start to use Facebook Page to showcase tourist attractions, a need will be created for tourists to visit the destination and equally consider recommending it to friends

Methodology
The content analysis research design was adopted for this study to analyze the posts on Facebook Pages of the Tourism Boards in Southern Nigeria between June 2019 and May

2020. Southern Nigeria has 17 states divided into three geopolitical zones (South-east, South-west, and South-South) that comprise six (except South-east that has five) states. The population of the study was the whole posts on the Facebook Pages of all the 17 Tourism Boards in Southern Nigeria within the period of study. Three states' Tourism Boards were randomly selected for the study. The units of analysis included photographs, texts, videos, and web links from the administrators of the Page. Data presentation involves both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of states Tourism Boards' Facebook presence

States	Likes	Followers
Enugu	4,321	4321
Abia	142	144
Imo	23	23
Rivers	171	171
Cross River	809	810
Edo	2,272	2,324
Lagos	None	None
Oyo	77	77
Ondo	None	None

The table indicates that seven out of the nine Tourism Boards in Southern Nigeria have a Facebook presence. The Pages have a varying number of likes and following. The number of likes and following indicates the number of people who have subscribed to be getting information updates about the activities of the organization or brand. This finding corroborates Herman Cheng, the Chief Executive Officer of *FunShare's* comment that "Facebook gives a platform where we can enhance our brand presence, build a user community and convert these users into paying customers" (Facebook, 2019). The motive for having a Facebook presence is for visibility or the awareness of the organization or the brand.

Table 2: Most Conspicuous State's Tourism Board on Facebook

	Arts	Cultural	Promotional	Natural sites	Carnival
Abia	0	2	5	0	0
Cross River	0	4	6	0	5
Edo	53	64	16	2	5
Enugu	2	18	19	9	2
Imo	0	0	1	0	0
Lagos	0	0	0	0	0
Ondo	0	0	0	0	0
Oyo	0	2	1	1	0
Rivers	0	1	5	0	0
Total	**55**	**91**	**53**	**12**	**12**

The table shows that seven states' Tourism Boards have active Facebook Pages where messages are posted. The states of Edo and Enugu have 118 and 50 displays respectively

as the most active states of Facebook. The bulk of the stories and displays border on culture and arts. This finding supports Richard and Munster (2010: p.16) observation that "cultural tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel and still continues to be a mainstay of the tourism industry in most parts of the world". Arts are cultural souvenirs, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO: p.4) sees cultural tourism as "the movement of persons to cultural attractions with the intention to gather new information and experience to satisfy their cultural needs".

Table 3: The aspects of tourism Facebook users appreciate most on Facebook Pages of the Tourism Boards

The number of likes, shares and comments each aspect of tourism garnered was used to determine the people's preferred tourist activity.

	Arts	Cultural	Promotional	Natural site	Carnival	Total
Edo State						
Likes	313(39.5%)	229(29.0%)	240(30.3%)	0	10 (1.2%)	100%
Shares	82(45.6)	41(22.8)	57 (31.6)	0	0	100%
Comments	21(30.4)	13(18.8)	35 (50.7)	0	0	100%
Enugu State						
Likes	6 (2.4%)	114 (44.9%)	66 (26.0%)	63 (24.8%)	5(2.0%)	100%
Shares	4 (10.8)	9 (24.3)	16 (43.2)	7 (19.0)	1(2.7)	100%
Comments	0	9 (18)	10 (20)	30 (60)	1(2)	100%

The table shows that from the Pages of the two leading states' Tourism Boards' activities, Facebook users appreciated arts, culture, and promotional activities. Many scholars have seen art and culture as cultural tourism. For instance, Facebook users on Edo State Tourism Boards Page liked (39.5%), and shared (45.6%) messages on Arts, but commented the most on promotional activities mainly because it involved making further inquiries. For Enugu, the cultural aspect was the most liked while the promotion was the most shared. This finding shows that Facebook users of the Tourism Boards liked, shared, and commented more on the most prominent tourism activity on the platform. In other words, people appreciated the activities the tourism promoters showcased more such as arts, culture, and promotional activities.

This finding goes to support the theory/model of the hierarchy of effects. The theory/model involves (a) presentation of rational facts and features to create desire or liking (b) emotional reactions and (c) action of making a purchase (Vitale, 2006). Corroborating the foregoing, Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga, and Bronner, (2018) observe that "social media monitoring tools, such as the number of likes, shares, comments, views, followers, or clicks are indicators providing quantitative metrics of the level of engagement or valence of engagement, that is action (positive or negative comments)". Engagement can either be passive or active. Dolan, Conduit and Fahy (2016:p.107) note that "creating, contributing and destructing represent active engagement behavior that potentially impacts on other social media users, while consuming, dormancy and detaching are passive and/or individualized forms of engagement" In other words, the mode and frequency of Facebook display of touristic activities determine the rate and direction people's response.

Conclusion

The findings show that inasmuch as tourism holds the potential of transforming the country's economy, many state Tourism Boards are yet to appreciate the effect of social media (Facebook) promotion on the overall performance of the tourism business. Facebook metrics such as likes, shares, and comments are good indicators to determine the engagement level between an organization or brand and its customers or users. The large following experienced in Edo and Enugu Facebook pages is an indication that if well promoted, tourism would generate revenue for other states that may have very attractive sites. More so, with the active nature of the tourism consumers, the Tourism Boards would know where to channel their energy in order to satisfy the customers. Based on the findings, it is recommended that states' Tourism Boards should partner with private individuals to initiate community-based enlightenment programmes on the value of using social media for promoting rural and local tourism. Through this way, so many other sites might be discovered and promoted for patronage.

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