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ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS INFLUENCING VISIT AND TOURIST INFLUX IN OLD OYO AND OKOMU NATIONAL PARK LODGES, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine socio-demographic characteristics of visitors, factors that influence visitors' patronage, influx status of Nigerian and foreign visitors in Old Oyo and Okomu National Parks, Nigeria. Random sampling method was used to administer 512 copies of a questionnaire to visitors of the national parks and data was analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Majority of the respondents were males at Old Oyo (68.5%) and Okomu (62.8%) national parks, 45.6% and 37.6% had HND/BSC at Old Oyo and Okomu National Parks respectively. Also, highest percentage of the respondents at both parks earned less than ₦150, 000 (61.5% at Old Oyo and 65.7% at Okomu National Parks). Conducive environment (Mean: 4.26) and Attractiveness of the area (Mean: 3.80) were ranked as the highest factors enhancing visit to Old Oyo and Okomu National Park lodges respectively. 15,365 Nigerian tourists and 34 foreign tourists have visited Okomu National Park while 13,021 Nigerian tourists and 319 foreign tourists have visited Okomu National Park for the period of 2009- 2018. Finally, there is no significant difference in the visitors' influencing factors at Old Oyo and Okomu National Park lodges (P=0.120). Therefore, destination management should improve the maintenance of their facilities to meet the standard of visitors, both locally and internationally in order to attract more foreign visitors and improve foreign exchange

Keywords: Demographic characteristics**,** Influx, motivation, visit, National Park, Lodge

INTRODUCTION

Protected areas have been identified and investigated to have a great value for ecology, recreation and culture and these attributes make them attractive to tourists (Kamri and Radam, 2013). Nigeria's tourism policy is seeking to maintain and grow a viable tourism industry that would create a diversity in the economy away from the oil sector, while making sure the utilization of the environment is sustainable (National Planning Commission, 2010). In such policy frameworks, there is an expectation of tourism destinations with trends towards low volume–high cost (Ngoka and Lameed, 2013). Furthermore, visit influencing factors such as the condition of the environment or ecological setting can have an effect on the visit trends to national parks, thereby creating a scenario where certain periods of the year experience higher number of visitors to national parks while other seasons experience low numbers. This usually produce peaks in the number of visitors, with some seasons/periods experiencing more visits than other periods (Cannas, 2012).

The attractiveness of a tourism destination is segmented into natural and artificial components and these components aid the patronage and enjoyment of a tourism destination (Fadda and Sørensen, 2017). Therefore, it is the role of a tourist site to become an attraction so as to influence visitors in patronizing the site (Fadda and Sørensen, 2017). There is a very high tendency of a visitor to have a repetition of his or her visit to a tourist site if the visitor has a perception that the site is attractive and enjoyable (Owusu-Frimpong *et al.*, 2013). Due to this assertion, it is clear that resources and facilities available in a destination serve as visit influencing factors for visitors and forms the attractiveness of the site, so this forms a major focus for management of the specific sites as attractions significantly influence trip behavior of visitors (Woyo, 2018). Furthermore, an understanding of factors that influence visitors to patronize a park will help park service providers in planning for the best way to utilize resources available in the parks and how tourism impact can be managed (Pan and Ryan, 2007).

So many researches have been carried out in national parks and natural areas. Konijnendijk *et al*. (2013) found out that parks and natural areas in cities have a weak connection with tourism in many Nations. Researches have also investigated ecotourism potential of parks (Chen and Jim, 2012), visitor preference in parks (Cheung and Jim, 2013), willingness to pay for ecotourism activities (Cheung and Jim, 2014), and the possibility of establishing a "green brand" making use of park resources (Chan and Marafa, 2014). However, there is a knowledge gap in identifying factors that influence visit to Nigerian National Parks as well as their tourist influx which this study aimed to find out.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Old Oyo and Okomu National Parks, Nigeria. Secondary and Primary data were used in this study. Secondary data was obtained through management records of tourist influx at the sites in order to ascertain the local and international visitation trend for the past ten years. Primary data was obtained through the use of well-structured questionnaire used to obtain information on visit influencing factors in the study. Krecjie and Morgan (1970) method of sampling determination was used to randomly select Five hundred and twenty-eight respondents for the study; two hundred and seventy-four from Old Oyo National Park and two hundred and fifty four from Okomu National Park out of which two hundred and seventy copies of questionnaire were retrieved at Old Oyo National Park while two hundred and forty-two copies of questionnaire were retrieved at Okomu National Park making a total of five hundred and twelve retrieved copies of questionnaire in total. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21) and results were presented descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive statistics involved the use of tables, frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation while inferential statistics involved the use of T-test to compare the differences in visitors' influencing factors to visit the parks

RESULTS
Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents at Old Oyo National Park and Okomu National Park. Majority of the respondents were males at Old Oyo (68.5%) and Okomu (62.8%) national parks. Findings also revealed that majority of the respondents were between the age range of 20-30 years at Old Oyo (49.3%) and Okomu (44.2%) National Parks and most of them were civil servants (32.6% at Old Oyo and 40.5% at Okomu National Parks). Highest percentage of the respondents at Old Oyo National Park were single (46.3%), 37.4% were married, 14.8% were widowed

and 1.5% were divorced while the highest percentage of respondents at Okomu National Park were single (52.5%), 42.1% were married, 3.3% were divorced and 2.1% were widowed. Furthermore, highest percentage of the respondents at both parks earned less than ₦150, 000 (61.5% at Old Oyo and 65.7% at Okomu National Parks).

Majority of the respondents at Old Oyo National Park were Nigerian (75.9%) and 24.1% were foreigners while majority of the respondents at Okomu National Park were Nigerians (67.4%) and 32.6% were foreigners.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Old Oyo National Park		Okomu National Park		Both Parks	
	Frequency (N=270)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N=242)	Percentage	Frequency (N=512)	Percentage
Gender						
Male	185	68.5	152	62.8	337	65.8
Female	85	31.5	90	37.2	175	34.2
Age						
20-30 years	133	49.3	107	44.2	240	46.9
31-40 years	80	29.6	61	25.2	141	27.5
41-50 years	32	11.9	56	23.1	88	17.2
51-60 years	16	5.9	8	3.3	24	4.7
61 years and above	9	3.3	10	4.1	19	3.7
Occupation						
Self-employed	86	31.9	88	36.4	174	34.0
Private sector employed	30	11.1	11	4.5	41	8.0
Retiree	10	3.7	5	2.1	15	2.9
Civil servant	88	32.6	98	40.5	186	36.3
Unemployed	56	20.7	40	16.5	96	18.8
Marital status						
Married	101	37.4	102	42.1	203	39.6
Single	125	46.3	127	52.5	252	49.2
Divorced	4	1.5	8	3.3	12	2.3
Widow/ Widower	40	14.8	5	2.1	45	8.8
Income						
Less than 150,000	166	61.5	159	65.7	325	63.5
151,000-200,000	39	14.4	15	6.2	54	10.5
201,000-250,000	26	9.6	11	4.5	37	7.2
251,000 and above	39	14.4	57	23.6	96	18.8
Nationality						
Nigerian	205	75.9	163	67.4	368	71.9
Foreigner	65	24.1	79	32.6	144	28.1

Table 2 and 3 present the factors that enhance visit to the Park lodges. Conducive environment (4.26), safety and security (4.04) and attractiveness of the area (3.91) were ranked by the visitors as the top three factors with the highest mean scores that enhance their visit to Old Oyo National Park lodge (Table 2) while attractiveness of the area (3.80), academic research work (3.75) and game viewing (3.74) were ranked by the visitors as the top three factors with the highest mean scores that enhance their visit to Okomu National Park lodge (Table 3).

Table 2: Factors that enhance visit to Old Oyo National Park lodge

Factors	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	St Dev.	Rank
Conducive environment	3 (1.1%)	6 (2.2%)	11 (4.1%)	148 (54.8%)	102 (37.8%)	4.26	0.736	1
Safety and security	2 (0.7%)	12 (4.4%)	22 (8.1%)	170 (63%)	64 (23.7%)	4.04	0.750	2
Attractiveness of the area	4 (1.5%)	10 (3.7%)	35 (13%)	178 (65.9%)	43 (15.9%)	3.91	0.751	3
Game viewing	7 (2.6%)	19 (7%)	12 (4.4%)	191 (70.7%)	41 (15.2%)	3.89	0.837	4
Serene environment	3 (1.1%)	17 (6.3%)	4 (1.5%)	230 (85.2%)	16 (5.9%)	3.89	0.644	4
Historical site	10 (3.7%)	18 (6.7%)	9 (3.3%)	205 (75.9%)	28 (10.4%)	3.83	0.842	6
Academic research work	1 (0.4%)	106 (39.3%)	9 (3.3%)	147 (54.4%)	7 (2.6%)	3.20	1.010	7
Quality of service	1 (0.4%)	117 (43.3%)	13 (4.8%)	120 (44.4%)	19 (7%)	3.14	1.076	8
Availability of hospitality services	10 (3.7%)	117 (43.3%)	15 (5.6%)	86 (31.9%)	42 (15.6%)	3.12	1.230	9
Good road network within the park	10 (3.7%)	120 (44.4%)	15 (5.6%)	77 (28.5%)	48 (17.8%)	3.12	1.257	9
Affordable prices on services	47 (17.4%)	52 (19.3%)	31 (11.5%)	130 (48.1%)	10 (3.7%)	3.01	1.234	11
Promptness of service	4 (1.5%)	168 (62.2%)	15 (5.6%)	53 (19.6%)	30 (11.1%)	2.77	1.120	12
Sport facilities	3 (1.1%)	160 (59.3%)	27 (10%)	78 (28.9%)	2 (0.7%)	2.69	0.928	13
Ease of transportation from the town to the park	17 (6.3%)	159 (58.9%)	13 (4.8%)	74 (27.4%)	7 (2.6%)	2.61	1.035	14

Keys: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, U- Undecided, A- Agree, SA- Strongly Agree

Table 4 reveals the tourist influx at Old Oyo and Okomu National Park Lodges from 2009 to 2018 as obtained from management records at the parks. 2015 recorded the highest number of Nigerian tourists (3617) at Old Oyo National Park, 2012 recorded the highest number of foreign tourist (9) and 2009 recorded the lowest number of tourists (616) at the park while at Okomu National Park, the highest number of Nigerian tourist (2021) was recorded in 2011, highest number of foreign tourists (121) was recorded in 2009 and 2017 recorded the lowest number of tourists at the park (720). These figures were further graphically represented in Figures 1 and 2.

Table 3: Factors that enhance visit to Okomu National Park lodge

| Factors	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	St Dev.	Rank
Attractiveness of the area	13 (5.4%)	16 (6.6%)	10 (4.1%)	171 (70.7%)	32 (13.2%)	3.80	0.940	1
Academic research work	15 (6.2%)	14 (5.8%)	24 (9.9%)	152 (62.8%)	37 (15.3%)	3.75	0.992	2
Game viewing	7 (2.9%)	29 (12%)	30 (12.4%)	130 (53.7%)	46 (19%)	3.74	0.995	3
Historical site	10 (4.1%)	23 (9.5%)	27 (11.2%)	157 (64.9%)	25 (10.3%)	3.68	0.931	4
Quality of service	10 (4.1%)	25 (10.3%)	28 (11.6%)	151 (62.4%)	28 (11.6%)	3.67	0.954	5
Affordable prices on services	6 (2.5%)	34 (14%)	36 (14.9%)	128 (52.9%)	38 (15.7%)	3.65	0.987	6
Serene environment	19 (7.9%)	16 (6.6%)	30 (12.4%)	155 (64%)	22 (9.1%)	3.60	1.015	7
Promptness of service	15 (6.2%)	27 (11.2%)	30 (12.4%)	145 (59.9%)	25 (10.3%)	3.57	1.025	8
Conducive environment	15 (6.2%)	28 (11.6%)	32 (13.2%)	144 (59.5%)	23 (9.5%)	3.55	1.023	9
Ease of transportation from the town to the park	8 (3.3%)	48 (19.8%)	51 (21.1%)	101 (41.7%)	34 (14%)	3.43	1.061	10
Safety and security	14 (5.8%)	43 (17.8%)	48 (19.8%)	110 (45.5%)	27 (11.2%)	3.38	1.080	11
Good road network within the park	9 (3.7%)	62 (25.6%)	43 (17.8%)	92 (38%)	36 (14.9%)	3.35	1.125	12
Availability of hospitality services	4 (1.7%)	48 (19.8%)	86 (35.5%)	69 (28.5%)	35 (14.5%)	3.34	1.007	13
Sport facilities	11 (4.5%)	151 (62.4%)	10 (4.1%)	59 (24.4%)	11 (4.5%)	2.62	1.045	14

Keys: *SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, U- Undecided, A- Agree, SA- Strongly Agree*

Table 4: Tourist Influx at Old Oyo and Okomu National Park Lodges

Years	Old Oyo Tourist influx		Okomu tourist influx	
	Nigerian	**Foreigner**	**Nigerian**	**Foreigner**
2009	616	0	1063	121
2010	825	4	1283	40
2011	1297	8	2021	60
2012	556	9	1213	19
2013	676	2	1080	18
2014	3617	8	1508	22
2015	3785	0	1105	21
2016	1935	2	1150	5
2017	915	0	718	2
2018	1143	1	1880	11
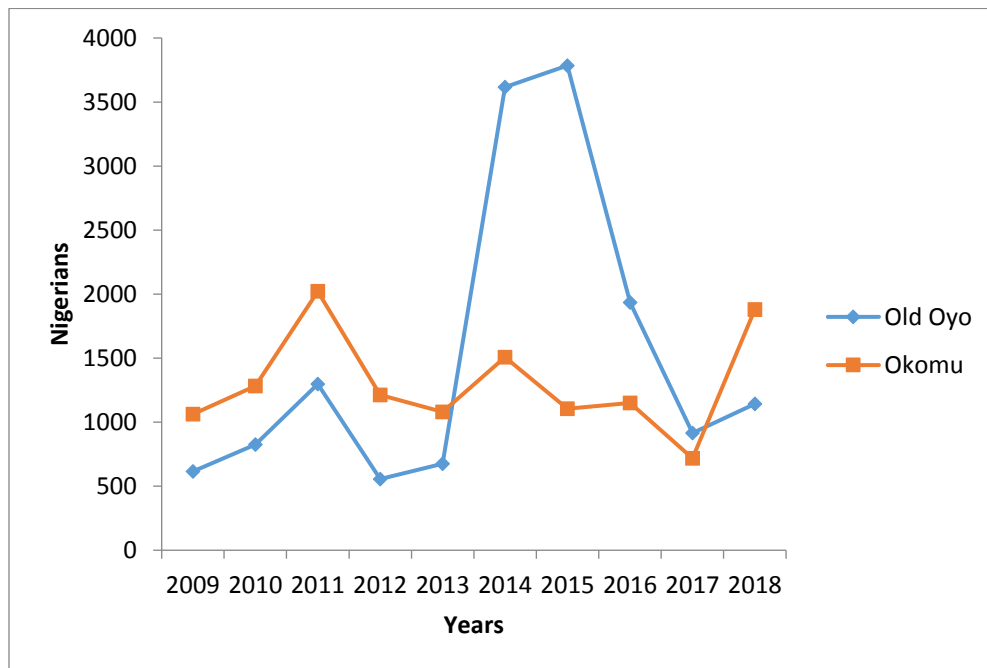
Figure 1: Nigerian tourist influx at both national park lodges
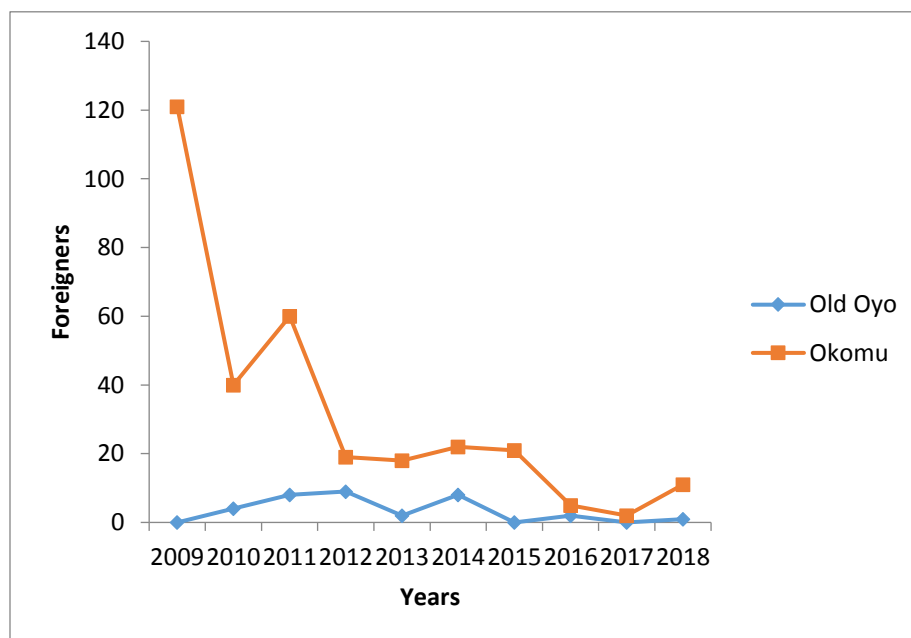
Figure 2: Foreigners tourist influx at both national park lodges

The T-test of difference in table 5 shows that there is no significant difference in the visitors' influencing factors to visit Old Oyo and Okomu National Park lodges (P=0.120).

Table 5: Difference in visit influencing factors at Old Oyo and Okomu National Park Lodges

Variables	Mean		Mean	t	df.	Sig.
	OONP	ONP	Difference			
Visit Influencing factors	3.39	3.51	-0.118	-1.558	510	0.120

P<0.05, keys: OONP- Old Oyo National Park lodge, ONP- Okomu National Park lodge

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that majority of the visitors at both park lodges are males. This is not in line with findings from Salleh *et al.* (2016) who reported more females than males. Highest percentage of the visitors have tertiary education. This supports findings from Joseph (2013) that most of the tourists in Nigeria are well-educated with the majority having a tertiary level of education. Highest percentage are within the youthful and energetic age range of 20-30 years. This is an adventurous age group as also opined by Jensen (2012) that "recreation/physical activities", "enjoying nature", "prestige and impression" and "social seeking" were very significant influencing factors for young people visiting protected areas. Also, majority of the visitors are Nigerians and are civil servants with low income. This could be the reason for choosing domestic tourism as opined by Chen *et al.* (2009) that travellers with less income tend to take frequent domestic vacations rather than international trips. Furthermore, majority of the visitors are single as supported by Meng and Uysal (2008) who reported that visitors who are not married seek adventure activities in a destination more than married visitors.

Findings from this study revealed that conducive environment, attractiveness of the area, academic research work and game viewing were highly ranked factors enhancing their visit to the National Park lodges. This is consistent with findings by Fung and Jim (2015) in their study of nature-based tourism in Hong Kong Geopark in which they identified three factors of motivation, including "nature ambience motivation", "inherent heritage motivations", and "social and accessibility motivations", with "nature ambience" being the most influential factor. Kamri and Radam (2013) also stated national parks are known to have tremendous value for ecology, recreation and culture, all of which draw people to them. Safety and security were also considered as a factor enhancing visitors' choice of the National Park lodges which is in line with Lee (2015) who used the following satisfaction factors: "information services", "recreation facilities" and "safety and sustainability in his motivation study for visitors in a protected area.

Highest number of Nigerian visitors were recorded in 2015 and 2011 at Old Oyo National Park and Okomu National Park respectively. Also, the number of foreign visitors over the years have not been encouraging. Throughout the period from 2009 to 2018, there was not a particular growing trend in the tourist influx. These fluctuations in the visitors' influx could be as a result of the economic situation of Nigeria as observed by Holloway (2006) that the economic situation of host nations often affects tourism demand. Relatively higher number of visitors were recorded at Old Oyo National Park than Okomu National Park. This could be attributed to the savannah ecosystem of the region as opposed to the rainforest ecosystem of Okomu National Park making it difficult to sight wild animals at Okomu National Park as opposed to Old Oyo National Park as supported by Lameed (2004) that the rugged and challenging terrain typical of a park in the rainforest region limits the number of tourists who might opt to choose the destination. The dominant domestic visitors as opposed to

foreign visitors recorded at these parks contradicts the observations of Awaritefe (2004) that the national parks of Third World countries are patronized mainly by foreigners rather than nationals of the countries where the parks are located. This implies more developments needs to be done in Nigerian National Parks in order to attract more foreign visitors thereby promoting inbound tourism.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the visit influencing factors and patronage status of visitors to Old Oyo and Okomu National Park. It can thus be concluded that more males visit both parks, most of the visitors have tertiary education and earn less than one hundred and fifty thousand naira monthly. Conducive environment, safety and security, attractiveness of the area, academic research work and game viewing were highly ranked factors that influenced the visitors to visit the park lodges. Also, tourist influx over the past ten years revealed Old Oyo National Park to have more Nigerian visitors and Okomu National Park to have more foreign visitors.

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