

Key Stakeholders' Perspectives on Destination Marketing Success: A Case of Beyond the Return

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Introduction

Tourism is a domain that comprises of diverse stakeholders (Duarte Alonso, 2017). There are a number of studies, including Mitchell et al. (1997), that have been conducted in the quest to define and identify stakeholders of an organisation. Definitions of stakeholders have been categorised into narrow and broad. The narrow definitions consider stakeholders based on the influence they have on the economic interest of an organisation. The broad definitions of stakeholders' scope go beyond the economic interest of an organisation. One of these broad definitions is the one offered by Freeman (1984, p46), where stakeholders are viewed as "... any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of the organisation's objectives." It is observable that the perspective of Freeman (1984) on an organisation's stakeholders is very broad and inclusive. As a result, the current study is informed by this definition. Stakeholders engage in various marketing activities in order to achieve goals set by tourist destinations. Due to this, destination marketing is now recognised as the fulcrum of growth and sustainability of tourism destinations in the future due to the highly globalised and competitive nature of tourists' markets (UNWTO, 2011).

There are four crucial propositions pertaining to global tourism that reinforce the importance of Destination Marketing. The first proposition asserted by Leiper (1979) is that almost every aspect of tourism occurs at a particular destination. The second proposition is that tourism destination is "the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism" (WTO, 2002). The assertion of Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002) that tourism destinations have become the biggest brands in the travel industry is considered the third proposition. The final proposition is that many countries, states and cities have shifted their funding attention towards Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) (Fyall, Garrod and Wang, 2012; Wang and Pizam, 2011), Destination Marketing comprises operational activities that are carried out in a dynamic and highly competitive business environment that entices visitors to localities (UNWTO, 2007, 2011).

Tourism destination has been recognised as the fundamental unit of research and management decision. Despite the diverse perspectives on tourism destination, the current study is informed by the definition of Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010), where tourism destination is considered as any "geographical region, political jurisdiction, or major attraction, which seeks to provide visitors with a range of satisfying to memorable visitation experiences." Visitors qualify to be described as tourists when they, at a minimum, visit destinations outside their usual places of abode. It is noteworthy that tourism industry in general and destination tourism in particular took a nosedive due to the Covid-19 Pandemic that led to a lot of travel ban and restrictions. It was in the year 2021 that the tourism industry in Africa started recovering. "It's contribution to the region's total economy grew by 23.5%, increasing from US\$ 97 billion in 2020 to US\$ 119 billion in 2021." The observable recovery of the Africa's tourism industry led to a significant enhancement of the contribution of Travel and Tourism towards GDP, which rose from 3.8% in 2020 to 4.4% in 2021 (Global Economic

Impact and Trends, 2021). As a result of the significance of the tourism industry, many African countries are developing strategies and systems that will attract many foreign tourists. For instance, in Ghana, Ministry of Tourism has, since 1992, been focusing its attention more on enticing foreign tourists than their domestic counterparts. A number of initiatives, including the “Pan African Historical Theatre Festival (Panafest)”, “the Year of the Return” and “Beyond the Return” are some of the strategic initiatives undertaken with the aim of wooing foreign tourists, specifically, those from the diaspora to experience the rich culture of Ghana and promote tourist sites in the country (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019).

PANAFEST has become a landmark festival in Ghana which gives indigenes of Africa, including Africans who dwell in the diaspora, the opportunity “to address the most traumatic interruption that ever occurred in the natural evolution of African societies which among other traumas profoundly eroded the self-confidence and freedom for self-determination of a whole people” (Panafest, 2023). “The Year of Return” is the celebration of “the cumulative resilience of all the victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade who were scattered and displaced through the world in North America, South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia” (The Year of Return, 2019). It worthy of note that “The Year of Return was celebrated to commemorate the 400th Anniversary of the arrival of the first recorded enslaved Africans in Jamestown Virginia in 1619” (VisitGhana, 2023). The occasion was also used to celebrate how resilient the African people have been throughout the 400-year period. It has been noted that the celebration of “The Year of Return” was also an initiative to welcome everybody of African origin back to Africa, especially Ghana (Beyond the Return, 2023). “Beyond the Return” – is a 10-year project under the theme, “A decade of African Renaissance – 2020-2030” (VisitGhana, 2023). The “Beyond the Return” initiative that serves as a follow-up to the successful “Year of Return” Ghana 2019’ campaign.

A number of studies have been conducted in the area of destination marketing and stakeholders (see Buhalis, 2000; Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010; Pike and Page, 2014; Jørgensen, 2017; Mensah, 2022). Despite the existence of these studies, most of the extant literature focused on western contexts and have varied objectives from this study. In addition, none of the literature reviewed in the field of destination marketing and stakeholders focused on “Beyond the Return” Project in Ghana. This research therefore attempts to fill the lacuna in the literature by setting different objectives and exploring Key Stakeholders’ Perspectives on Destination Marketing Success in Ghana with “Beyond the Return” as a case study. This research will aid expand the destination marketing literature especially in developing economies and provide directions that can assist in the successful implementation of the Beyond the Return and other projects. This study will therefore make contributions to literature, industry players and policy makers.

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore expected contributions of key stakeholders in the Beyond the Return Project
- To identify benchmarks for determining success of the Beyond the Return Project
- To explore collaborative strategies for achieving success in the Beyond the Return Project

- To unearth challenges faced by key stakeholders in the Beyond the Return Project
- To identify the ways by which The Beyond the Return Project can be sustained and improved

Literature Review

The literature focused on issues related to destination marketing and stakeholders, the Tourism Industry in Ghana and “The Beyond the Return Project”.

Destination Marketing and Stakeholders

There are numerous research works which have been conducted on the significance of inter-organisational links between destinations, and the impact of organizational collaborations on organisations. In effect, it needs to be recognized that every network is characterized by a number of different role-players. As indicated by research findings, including Howlett and Ramesh (1995), Rhodes (1997) and Scott et al. (2008), some of these role-players are external to the organization, as they span across the organisational boundaries and structures. According to Burstein (1991) they consist of various commitments by members of the network towards a set of common goals. This “connectedness”, tends to provide opportunity for members to transfer and sharing knowledge with one another, which is considered a significant catalyst for innovation and competitiveness.

The performance of an individual firm is therefore influenced by the behaviour of other firms that belong to the same network. The stakeholder theory propounded by Freeman (1984) emphasises this position. According to Freeman (1984, p. 46), “a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives.” The stakeholder theory also makes reference to managerial decision making. According to Freeman (1984) stakeholders are the people who have direct influence on managerial decision-making. Freeman (1984, p. 46) contends that “to be an effective strategist you must deal with those groups that can affect you, while to be responsive (and effective in the long run) you must deal with those groups that you can affect”. It is from this argument that tourist destination becomes very crucial. This is because the positive experience and high level of satisfaction of tourists has a significant impact on the overall economic success of the geographical region as many affiliate firms tend to also benefit from the success of the tourism industry (Presenza and Cipollina, 2010). Even though both managers of the tourist destinations and researchers are aware of the need to engage stakeholders for the goal of making tourist destinations competitive, there are considerable challenges that impede the realisation of this goal (Trunfio and Della Lucia, 2019).

The Tourism Industry in Ghana

Ghana has a wide range of tourist sites which can provide huge revenue inflows. Some of the ecotourism sites are the Kakum National Park and the Mole National Park. Adventure sites and attractions include the Paragliding Festival, Mount Afadja popularly called Mountain Afadjato, (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, 2023). Dodi World, Legon Botanical Gardens, Boti Falls, Nzulezu Village are some of the adventure sites and attractions. Ghanaian heritage is also manifested through the presence of the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles. There are also many festivals that demonstrate the Ghanaian Culture (VisitGhana, 2023). Although Ghana had abundant and diverse natural and cultural resources for tourism

development when it became the first country in the Sub-Saharan Africa to obtain political independence from European/British colonial rule since 6th March, 1957, the country's tourism industry did not receive significant political attention until the 1990s. The industry witnessed the government's interest for the first time when a feasibility study on the prospects of the industry was done in 1970. The feasibility study centred on the development of tourist attractions in the country for a five-year period (1972-1976) (Obuan Committee, 1972). The Ministry of Tourism, in the year 1993, was established with the prerogative of policy formulation and planning of tourism development in the country. Ministry of Tourism is also mandated to promote Ghana's domestic, regional, and international tourism.

Another conspicuous characteristic of Ghana's tourism industry is that it is overwhelmingly dependent on international tourists for revenue. In 1987, the tourism industry received 103,440 arrivals. The figure increased to 113,784 in 1988 (Addo, 2011). In recent times, international arrivals in 2016 was 932,579. This figure increased to 969,156 in 2017. The number of arrivals decreased to 956,372 in 2018 but the sector experienced 1,130,37 which is a surge in the number of arrivals (Ghana Tourism Report, 2019).

The Beyond the Return Project

The Beyond the Return Project provides an avenue for stakeholder engagements among the people of African origin, irrespective their current places of residence. The President of Ghana set up of 21 Member Committee to champion the project (Diaspora Affairs, 2021) and its pillars were officially unveiled in June 2020 (VisitGhana, 2023). The project which was launched after a successful Year of Return Campaign has seven pillars: Experience Ghana, Invest in Ghana, Diaspora Pathway to Ghana, Celebrate Ghana, Brand Ghana, Give Back Ghana and Promote Pan-African Heritage and Innovation (Beyond the Return, 2023). The first pillar, experience Ghana is to encourage people of Africans descent to visit Ghana in order to have memorable experiences of the country's warm hospitality, rich culture and entertainment. Experience Ghana also aims at establishing strong ties between Ghanaians and Africans in the diaspora (VisitGhana, 2023). The pillar which is invest Ghana is geared towards motivating Africans in the diaspora to engage in investment activities such as housing schemes. This is hoped to be attained through reducing the bottlenecks inherent in investment in Ghana (Beyond the Return, 2023). The third pillar, diaspora pathways to Ghana is to utilise legal and policy frameworks to enhance diaspora activities. The core focus are in the areas of citizenship programmes, educational and work exchanges as well and residence and work permits (VisitGhana, 2023). Celebrate Ghana, another pillar seeks to imbibe nationalistic tendencies in Africans from the diaspora through a host of activities including festivals and media programmes on the national calendar. The fifth pillar, brand Ghana aims at developing Ghana as the leading tourist destination in Africa and a home of Africa renaissance (Beyond the Return, 2023). The next pillar, give back to Ghana, seeks to inculcate the sense of providing community services among Africans in the diaspora. Areas of support are adopting community projects, engaging in tree-planting exercises and clean-up campaigns (VisitGhana, 2023). The final pillar is to promote Pan-African and Ghanaian heritage. This pillar focus on the development of more tourist sites and infrastructure beyond those already in existence (Beyond the Return, 2023). The tourism literature in Ghana emphasised previous government initiatives. Pierre (2009) for instance, researched on "Panafest", Mensah (2022) and Gebauer and Umscheid (2021) also studied the "Year of

Return”, but a new project, The “Beyond the Return” has not received attention in the tourism literature. This study therefore seeks to expand the destination tourism literature through researching on the Beyond the Return from Stakeholders Perspectives.

Methods

The study adopts the interpretivist philosophy that aids to provide varied responses from interviewees and create meanings of a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2007). The interpretivism appreciates social reality from different perspectives and the study will be guided to embrace responses based on subjectivism and varied stakeholders and their perspectives. The inductive approach which is consistent with the interpretivist philosophy has been chosen. The researcher adopted the qualitative methodical choice in order to gather insights and opinions from experts (Creswell, 2014). These experts who are stakeholders will share perspectives on destination marketing with focus on “Beyond the Year of Return”. The case study is chosen in order to obtain focus and detailed research findings on a novel project, “Beyond the Year of Return” within the tourism space in Ghana. This research will purposively sample the interviewees in order to identify individuals who have knowledge and information about the area of study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Sample for the study will be drawn from Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Ghana Tourism Authority, Beyond the Return Secretariat and Steering Committee as well as Show Organisers and Promoters. The sample must satisfy an inclusion criteria. According to Keung et al (2020), inclusion criteria entails requirements that likely respondents must have in order to be part of a study. In order to be part of this research, the likely participants should be directly linked to the “Beyond the Return Project” and should be able to provide expert knowledge. Individuals who did not meet these criteria will be excluded from the study. Data will be collected in Accra which is the capital of Ghana. Accra is the central area where most government and commercial activities in Ghana takes place. It is therefore a place where most tourism stakeholders can be found and most tourism activities are planned as well. The sample size will be between 9-17 interviewees based on data saturation (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). The sample size is not definite since data has not been collected and data saturation, a state in which sufficient data has been collected to draw conclusions is likely to occur between 9-17 as stipulated by Hennink and Kaiser (2022). Pilot study will be conducted on 5 interviewees in order to fine-tune the data collection instrument (Palinkas et al., 2015). Semi-structured interview guide will be administered personally because of its flexibility of allowing more information to be obtained from respondents (Cachia and Millward, 2011). The interview is expected to last an average of 30 minutes per participant. Thematic analysis will be conducted in order to identify, analyse and report similarity patterns of responses of data in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis will be done manually and follow Braum and Clarke process which are familiarisation, coding, ‘searching’ for themes, reviewing themes and writing the report.

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