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Full Length Research Paper

A review of the role of tour operators towards sustaining ecotourism in Tanzania

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Technology (NM-AIST), Arusha, Tanzania.

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This review paper assesses the role of tour operators towards sustaining ecotourism in Tanzania. The motive behind it is based on the argument that tour operators have an important role within the ecotourism multi-stakeholder. However, little has been documented on how best to engage them for sustainable ecotourism. Thus, this paper provides a concise overview of the relevant literature, highlighting existing knowledge and gaps for prospective future research. In addition to the literature review and methods, the result section of the paper is organized in such a way that it elaborates on key concepts and provides the setup and organization of tour operators. As a core part of the review, this study underlined four key roles of tour operators towards sustainable ecotourism: their involvement in planning, development, promotion, and implementation of ecotourism products. The study concluded that ecotourism supporting and regulating machinery must work closely and strategically with tour operators at the individual level or through their existing tourism associations in order to ensure that those four identified areas are effectively and efficiently carried out, not only to enhance their business but also to conserve and market the destination sites and contribute to the country's revenue.

Key words: sustainable ecotourism, tour operators, Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

Traveling to unspoiled natural and cultural places is prevalent in most countries. The motivation could be relaxation, enjoyment, learning knowledge, or inherent admiration for people, plants, and animals. To a considerable extent, this method encourages both natural and cultural conservation for the social and economic benefit of all stakeholders, especially local populations. This type of tourism is known as ecotourism, and similar characteristics of this description have been expanded in

culture to promote the active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local populations, as demonstrated in Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996).

As indicated by Weaver et al. (2007), ecotourism is one of the tourist subsectors that are increasing at a rapid pace. This is simply because its popularity with people is strong, owing to its protective character of cultural aspects, nature, and the environment of the destination sites. According to Pasape et al. (2014a), natural and

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cultural resources contribute greatly to sustainable development, particularly in terms of environmental conservation. According to Parris and Kates (2003), enthusiasts of sustainable development differ in their focus on what is to be sustained, what is to be developed, how to integrate environment and development, and how long should be allowed to exist. Therefore, ecotourism requires taking into account the activity's long-term impact; hence, tourism is good for the future and ensures the future by being accountable in the long run. Local communities are given special consideration in order to protect resources in the long run. As a result, as disclosed by Nwokorie and Adeniyi (2020), local communities must be informed of the impact of the various expedition activities on resource utilization so that the inhabitants who have access to ecotourism attraction sites are aware of the consequences of their actions and are engaged in conservation plans and strategies.

Tourism, according to Farsari (2012), causes numerous environmental problems: air pollution, water pollution, damage to fauna and flora, historical sites and buildings, waste, high energy consumption. These environmentally damaging impacts have contributed to greater awareness of the need for a shift to a more responsible form of tourism, ecotourism being one of them. Ecotourism is thought to have a low social and environmental impact, and it incorporates a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities, tour operators, and local and central governments. Similarly, Das and Chatterjee (2015) described the idea of ecotourism as well as contemporary practices, revealing that improving local livelihoods through ecotourism is commonly considered as an important policy instrument for biodiversity protection.

A number of researchers have claimed that ecotourism has a positive social, economic, and environmental impact. This is because it makes efficient use of natural resources, thereby creating new jobs and economic opportunities such as tour guide, hospitality, restaurant, and transportation jobs, as well as improving social entrepreneurship and promoting the status of local businesses and living standards, as evidenced by Zambrano et al. (2010), Nyaupane and Poudel (2011), Reimer and Walter (2013), and Ahmad et al. (2016). However, due to a mismatch between goal and practice, ecotourism has been a strongly debated topic since its deployment in various places.

Statement of the problem and study justification

Despite the sector's main success, ecotourism has been facing a number of hurdles and setbacks in Africa over the last 30 years. These have been ascribed to limits related to civil conflicts and poor governance, which in turn affect security, triangularity, and environmental degradation, emasculating the potential and trajectory of ecotourism expansion. Aside from that, most

infrastructure support, such as roads, airlines, and information and communication technology is deplorable, making ecotourism destinations difficult to access and affordable. Furthermore, evidences of insufficient human resources functioning as ecotourism practitioners, limited funding alternatives, and corruption are relevant, resulting in an inability to minimize the negative and unwanted impact of ecotourism as specified by Backman and Munanura (2015). All of these combined with a lack of stakeholders' engagement in ecotourism management and conservation may have an impact on the physical, natural, and cultural ecotourism resources for both present and future use.

Due to the above challenges, a number of researchers have gained an interest in working more on ecotourism, as evidenced in Drumm and Moore (2002), Garrod (2003), Mgonja et al. (2015), Clifton and Benson (2006), Backman and Munanura (2015), Courvisanos and Jain (2006), Aban et al. (2016), Ahmad et al. (2016), Pasape and Mujwiga (2017), Nugroho et al. (2018), Li and Liu (2020), Saidmamatov et al. (2020), Kerimbergenovich et al. (2020), Motlagh et al. (2020), Angessa et al. (2022) and Rahman et al. (2022). Besides, Motlagh et al. (2020) still urge more comprehensive studies on both the positive and negative aspects of sustainable ecotourism.

According to Li and Liu (2020), from 1990 to 2016, stakeholders such as researchers and policy makers at both local and national levels viewed sustainable ecotourism activities as a viable conservation strategy and an important means to accomplish sustainable tourism. Also, in order to deepen and concretize ecotourism research, the authors urge that more studies be performed, concentrating on interdisciplinary involvement and multistakeholders' participation, specifically on ecotourism awareness and behavior.

As demonstrated by Pasape and Mujwiga (2017), tour operators have been designated as major stakeholders and have proven to play a crucial and significant role within the multi-stakeholder team in ecotourism. However, little has been documented or conveyed about how the best tour operators may be leveraged to sustain ecotourism in Tanzania. Therefore, the goal of this review research is to investigate how tour operators, as key stakeholders, can help ensure the long-term sustainability of ecotourism. The main purpose of this review article is to provide a concise overview of both previous and current progress in tour operator involvement in sustainable ecotourism. The article specifically highlights and clarifies the subject matter for various stakeholders in the ecotourism sector, with the purpose of promoting sustainable ecotourism through existing knowledge and identifying gaps for future research.

This review research is organized into six parts. The first part of the introduction gives background information on the topic area as well as an explanation of the problem and purpose of the research. The second part contains a literature review that demonstrates the

conceptual framework and related empirical research that has been conducted to date. The third section includes a brief overview of the author's actions and methodology for conducting this review study. The fourth part, results, is the most covered part of this study. In this section, the author covers the set up and organization of tour operators in Tanzania, as well as the methods in which tour operators might sustain ecotourism by focusing on planning, development, promotion, and execution of ecotourism products. The author gives critiques, suggestions, and directions for sustainable ecotourism employing tour operators in the fifth part of the discussion, as well as suggestions for future areas of research. The conclusion and recommendations were included in the sixth section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism in Tanzania

Anderson (2010) revealed that most of the tourists visiting Tanzania are linked to ecotourism attraction sites. This is because it is anticipated that almost 90% of Tanzanian visitors follow nature-based tourism. According to the United Republic of Tanzania through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (2022), Tanzania is believed to be one of the distinctive destinations compared to most African countries, despite the fact that not all people around the world are aware of that. The country is blessed with abundant flora and fauna in most of its places, particularly in its 16 national parks, such as Serengeti, Arusha, Ngorongoro, and Manyara, as well as 17 game reserves and one conservation area. Tanzania is also home to the highest mountain in Africa, namely Mount Kilimanjaro, and the beautiful islands of Zanzibar. The country also hosts three of Africa's great lakes, namely Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa. All of these ecotourism destinations protect the country's unique natural and cultural heritage for future generations, keeping it safe from deforestation and urbanization.

Based on Mseri (2019), Tanzania categorized ecotourism into three zones, namely as southern circuits, western circuits, and northern circuits. Specifically, while the southern circuit comprises Ruaha National Park, Katavi, Udzungwa, and Selous game reserves, the western circuit embraces the beauty of Burigi Chato, Gombe, and Rubondo. Besides, the northern circuit covers Kilimanjaro, Lushoto, Usambara, Ngorongoro, and Serengeti. Mgonja et al. (2015) reported that the concept of ecotourism in Tanzania has recently been massively promoted because it offers an alternative, sustainable and low-cost tourism for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage while benefiting local communities. In spite of that, reports revealed that utilization of the country's ecotourism potential is still at a low level, mainly

due to accessibility challenges in some protected areas, inadequate infrastructure and systems, and inadequate marketing and promotion strategies. The authors highlighted the need for responsible regulators to set and articulate clear policies, laws, guidelines, and procedures towards managing and implementing ecotourism programs countrywide. Such legislative and revenue generation strategies must stipulate how different stakeholders can be engaged and ensure tourists are satisfied, businesses are prospering, and, at the same time, local communities are benefiting from social economic and revenue generation activities. That is possible not only with the current setup but also in the future as there is still room for growth, especially in the other circuits other than the northern circuit.

In addition to that, Tanzania does make use of the existing cultural and natural world heritage sites. Kilimanjaro and Serengeti national parks, Kondoa rock-art sites, Mount Meru, and nature reserves such as Amani, Uluguru, Nilo Kilombero, Mnazi Bay, and many more are just a few examples, according to Tanzania Tourist Board (2013), UNESCO (2014), and United Republic of Tanzania (2007 and 2015) cited in Mgonja et al. (2015). In Tanzania, community involvement in ecotourism has a long history. Nelson (2004), for example, stated that the first community-based tourism ventures consisted of very expensive non-permanent camping and hiking activities for foreign tourists using Arusha-based tour operators. This was due to the availability of ecotourism attractions and the need for diversification in the rapidly growing northern Tanzanian tourism industry. By the late 1990s, approximately 25 rural Tanzanian villages had some type of on-going or seasonal tourism activity, typically in collaboration with one or more private businesses. The laws governing how Tanzanian villages run their businesses made it possible for these initial agreements between private travel operators and local communities.

Moreover, Shoo and Songorwa (2013) contend that ecotourism is widely acknowledged as being essential for the preservation of natural resources and improvement of livelihoods, particularly in areas of developing countries with high biodiversity. Once local communities are involved in ecotourism, either formally or informally, the issue of collective management and strategies for conservation and sustainability becomes crucial. Therefore, activities targeted at maintaining the sustainability of ecotourism must be given higher priority in Tanzania and other nations that depend on the same kinds of resources.

Sustainability of ecotourism

Sustainable ecotourism is contemplated to be the methods, systems, and practices that ensure that the present needs are met while safeguarding those of future

generations by guaranteeing that natural and cultural resources are not depleted through the incorporation of both natural and human patterns all the time. As stated by Early (1993), Rosenbaum (1993), Union of Conservation Scientists, United Nations Environment Programme, and World Wide Fund for Nature (1991), and United Nation (1987), the goal of all of these is to improve one's well being and quality of life.

Several authors, including Nelson (2004), Charnley (2005), Shoo and Songorwa (2013), Pasape et al. (2014b), Mgonja et al. (2015), Pasape et al. (2015), and Backman and Munanura (2017) conducted studies on Tanzania's ecotourism sustainability. For instance, when looking at sustainable ecotourism indicators, Pasape et al. (2014a) look at sustainable ecotourism indicators. Their research revealed that, in terms of the preservation of ecological variety, the preservation of cultural heritage, the strategic involvement of stakeholders, and suitable infrastructural support, ecotourism indicators could be divided into four main clusters. The findings of this study indicate important sustainable ecotourism indicators that can be utilized to disseminate information for use now and in the future at different scales.

Courvisanos and Jain (2006) reported on Costa Rica, in Central America, that despite threats from high rates of deforestation and expanding large-scale tourism that trades on strong environmental credentials, the country's success in leading in environmental conservation and thus sustainable ecotourism was attributed to an analysis and development of policies for general development and management of both small-scale and large-scale ecotourism.

Rivera et al. (2009) also reported on another sustainable ecotourism study in the Philippines, this time focused on sustainability, environmental protection, and local community involvement. Furthermore, key industry actors were identified and included in the development of a value chain framework for Philippine ecotourism that includes the quadruple bottom-line strategy to understand how value chain participants conduct sustainable tourism.

Thus, in order to sustain ecotourism, the variables that determine sustainable ecotourism must first be identified. Pasape et al. (2013) explored strategic stakeholders' engagement as critical to the sustainability of Tanzanian ecotourism.

The key findings indicated that stakeholders in the ecotourism value chain must: form ecotourism community advocacy groups comprising villagers and local community members near ecotourism attraction sites; maintain close interaction with ecotourism businesses and service providers; government agencies and players from research and academic institutions; and establish and maintain strong ecotourism networks. Furthermore, the authors recommend strengthening public-private collaborations in areas such as infrastructure development, capacity building, information and communication sharing, research and development, and

project management. Clifton and Benson (2006) also performed research utilizing an Indonesian case study to examine the type and root causes of the socio-cultural effects of ecotourism. The findings reveal that the altruistic surplus theory of individual recognition of community benefits is equivalent to the positive nature of socio-cultural impacts reported by host communities as well as the unpredictable nature of economic benefits to host communities.

The level and extent of empowerment toward exploiting and managing ecotourism sustainably determines the extent of community engagement and profits from ecotourism. Pasape et al. (2014b) investigate the impact of community empowerment on Tanzania's sustainable ecotourism. The key variables under consideration were education programs, information availability, and language use. Most tourism stakeholders lack knowledge about ecotourism resource conservation and preservation, and most community members have limited access to information due to a lack of news outlets, a lack of tourist information centers, and the use of English and other foreign languages in information and marketing communication packs, according to the findings. As a result, community empowerment is highly recommended towards making ecotourism sustainable. Furthermore, Stone (2015) discovered mixed results in a study on community-based ecotourism in Botswana in terms of biodiversity protection and community livelihoods, owing to the huge number of stakeholders involved in the creation, planning, and implementation of ecotourism activities. Additionally, the authors advocate for a successful, evolving, and progressive stakeholder approach to natural resource management.

In another study, Pasape et al. (2015) explored the association between outstanding governance practices and sustainable ecotourism. The findings found that insufficient openness, low accountability, and fragile integration machines combining ecotourism and firm activities impair Tanzania's sustainability as well as the country's strategic and socioeconomic aspirations. Poor governance increases the likelihood of ineffective planning, inefficiencies, and mismanagement of ecotourism resources. As a result, all stakeholders' accountability, openness, and integration of ecotourism topics are vital not just for meeting current criteria but also for maintaining the sustainability of ecotourism.

Moreover, Pellis et al. (2015) examined organizational strategies and practices between 2007 and 2013 and discovered how best conservation NGOs can be employed as intermediators of various forms of conservation-related tourism, including ecotourism, when multi-actor interdependencies are considered. Mismatched scale making plainly impedes organizational goals, prompting a rethinking of tourism in terms of conservation landscapes. Despite this, the National Environment Management Council - NEMC (2013) highlighted that, in addition to funding, deforestation,

poaching, and human encroachment as a result of rapid population increase have repeatedly compromised the sustainability of ecotourism attractive locations. According to a recent National Environment Management Council assessment, Tanzania has a deforestation rate of about 1.1 percent per person. This rate is said to be twice as fast as global deforestation, which is currently running at a rate of 0.5 percent per year. This highlights the need to include all key stakeholders in sustainability initiatives, with tour operators recognized as crucial actors in those ecotourism sustainability-related projects because they fall under the category of ecotourism network in the majority of the research reviewed.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a review article format, drawing on previously published papers, to summarize the existing literature on the role of tour operators in sustaining ecotourism in Tanzania in an attempt to explain the current status, highlighting gaps and future possibilities. This review study, in particular, involves a systematic search in the existing literature on sustainable ecotourism and stakeholder engagement for an answer to a specific issue of making ecotourism sustainable using tour operators' organization, planning, product development, ecotourism business operations, and marketing.

Inspired by Tranfield et al. (2003) with the argument that undertaking a review of the literature is an important part of any research project; some of the traditional narrative reviews may lack thoroughness. The author enriches this review study by incorporating evidence-informed management reviews. This includes using the past research and literature on Tanzania's sustainable ecotourism and various tour operators' initiatives in ecotourism. This study started by assessing the background information, followed by identifying the problem statements and gaps. Thereafter, a thorough literature review was conducted.

The author makes use of seventy relevant studies to assess the past and current status, assess the gaps, and discuss and recommend the best practices as well as possible future research. The structure of the review involves both topics, focusing on general knowledge on sustainable ecotourism and ecotourism practices in the specific context of ecotourism in Tanzania and tour operators. The author also allowed for comparison and contrast method, as well as geographical area and publication dates, whenever needed. The following are the specifics of the systematic methodology's step-by-step procedure:

First and foremost, the author outlined the purpose and rationale for conducting a review study. This was linked to a recognized need and a gap in sustainability strategies for Tanzanian ecotourism. The author then lays out the design plan, specifying the procedures to be followed in order to achieve the study's goal. The author describes the features of the participant studies to be reviewed, as well as their essential components, in the study phase setup. The emphasis in this context was on studies on sustainable ecotourism, sustainable tourism, stakeholder participation, ecotourism products, ecotourism strategies, and related matters.

Following the study description, the selection criteria for both included and excluded studies were established. During that stage, the author specified the types of research ranging from published articles, books or book chapters, conference papers, and study reports at the national, regional, and international levels via the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The sources of such materials were also highlighted, with a focus on related publications on the subject, common authors on the subject,

relevant search engines and databases, and key search phrases. This method really helped in developing a comprehensive description of all of the data sources, methods, interventions, and necessary comparisons from the selected research.

The author continued with the stages of searching for all data and information that fit inside the boundaries and parameters described. With regard to the research's sustainability strategies utilizing tour operators, the collected information was divided into four major groups: planning of ecotourism products; development of ecotourism products; promotion strategies; as well as ecotourism implementation frameworks and strategies. Other variables considered include the existing state of ecotourism, current and recommended sustainability strategies, as well as the setup and structure of tour operators towards sustainable ecotourism.

Among the primary search tactics included in this review study are reputable electronic databases searched, with indexed journals given priority most of the time. The other area was language selection. This study was limited to English and Swahili, the author's and the case's native languages. The search process paves the way for the data collection process.

To avoid mistakes and errors, the author copied and pasted the relevant text from web sources during the data collection procedure. After that, the author read, recast, and interpreted the content using own understanding and interpretation of the topic. The author additionally stresses the study's quality and, most of the time, avoids bias wherever feasible by conducting a thorough examination of the technique used and study outcomes in relation to the evaluated works' study aims. Analysing the collected information entails interpreting the methodology, results, and recommendations in light of the current study's goal of comparison and contracting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides information, reasoning, and evidence for the four key responsibilities that tour operators can play in supporting ecotourism in Tanzania. The writers begin by emphasizing the necessary setup and organization to support the deployment of those tour operator duties.

Setup and organization of tour operators

For years, ecotourism in Tanzania involved a number of people mainly operating under specified networks of tour operators, hotel owners, transporters, tour agents, and investors, as revealed in the work of Pasape et al. (2013). Tanzanian tour operators are governed by the Tanzania Association of Tour Operators, often known as TATO, which is the government-recognized tour operator's representative and has long been a government partner in the implementation of several programs and policies. Since 1983, the association has represented the interests of its members, which include tour operators, air operators, hoteliers, and associate members; provided a common and ample position of the tourism industry to government institutions in all matters pertaining to policy formulation, planning, and maintaining high quality standards among its members and other intermediaries, as evidenced by TATO (2022).

Apart from TATO, tour operators have also been organized based on portfolio, e.g., Zanzibar Association of Tourism Investors, Hotels Association of Tanzania, Tanzania Association of Cultural Tourism Organizers, Tanzania Tour Guides Association, Tanzania Hunting Operators Association, Tanzania Professional Hunters Association, Tanzania Air Operators Association, Tanzania Society of Travel Agents, as well as private business owners involved in tourism, namely as the Tourism Confederation of Tanzania and union of tourism associations such as Intra-African Travel and Tourism Association as revealed in Tanzania Tourist Board (2022). As per statistics of 2020, the United Republic of Tanzania's Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (2022) reported that the number of tour operators had reached 1874.

Due to the importance of networks in the ecotourism business, Pasape and Mujwiga (2017) assessed the fundamental issues impeding Tanzania's ecotourism networks and discovered that the majority are experiencing financial difficulties, resulting in insufficient money to finance ecotourism enterprises, notably marketing. The issue worsens as access to and conditions for securing financial institutions deteriorate. In such circumstances, the ecotourism sector's success and sustainability would constantly lag behind due to a lack of funds to finance day-to-day operations and new products. Furthermore, the ecotourism network has infrastructure challenges such as limited direct flights and reliable roads to attraction places, pricey hotel services, and tourism legislative implementation during implementation (Pasape and Mujwiga, 2017).

Moreover, Anderson (2009) determined various roles of networks in an effort to promote ecotourism through networks in the Balearics, specifically acknowledging the power of networking or providing the right environmental education programmers; the role of networks in promoting green environments in hotel establishments; and warranting active participation in the process of controlling ecotourism quality and sustainability of use of all resources. A variety of ecotourism instruments, policies, and legislation were produced with the assistance of the networks.

Additionally, in terms of tour operators' business arrangements, some tour operators have counterparts in foreign lands in order to carry out ecotourism operations. These counterparts are known as outbound tour operators. The study was conducted by Nemasetoni and Rogerson (2017) to assess the dyadic relationships between Tanzanian inbound tour operators and their overseas outbound partners, with a focus on the effect of partner irreplaceability and distributive fairness on acquiescence and the subsequent effect that acquiescence has on conflict. According to the findings, establishing a partner agreement is critical in interfirm interactions and is critical to the development and sustainability of ecotourism businesses because it assists

the focus firm in achieving its goals.

The above structures, functions, and operations of tour operators as individual enterprises or as networks place them in a critical position in Tanzania's ecotourism business. As a result, it is in the author's best interests to figure out how to integrate those tour operators into making ecotourism more sustainable.

Ways through which tour operators can sustain ecotourism

Tour operators are involved in several strategic and operational activities that have the ability to influence the sustainability of ecotourism in Tanzania. For that reason, the need to establish the role of tour operators towards sustaining ecotourism becomes a very crucial and strategic matter. The following are four major ways towards achieving that goal

Planning ecotourism products

Planning is an essential component of any management decision-making process, and the involvement of important parties, including local communities, is strongly encouraged. However, in the context of ecotourism, Garrod (2003) observed that the effectiveness of local community participation is becoming increasingly rare in most ecotourism-related programs. Besides, France (1997) revealed that ecotourism programs in most tourist places might confront the risk of mass tourism, negatively compromising their sustainability. Thus, ecotourism sustainability plans and strategies are so unavoidable. According to Nugroho et al. (2018), developing ecotourism products requires extensive planning in which the roles and responsibilities of each participant at the macro, ecological, and local levels must be well defined and integrated. Spenceley and Manning (2013) stated in another study that best-practice planning approaches and programs consider all aspects of sustainable development, including economic, environmental, and social factors.

Tour operators engage in a variety of planning activities in order to prepare for ecotourism products. A tourist product, according to Noll et al. (2019), is made up of both tangible and intangible components. In most circumstances, the product components are given either individually or collectively to ecotourism travellers as a single coherent experience.

It is therefore recommended that the sustainability of tourism is heavily reliant on proper differentiation of product components during planning, so that it is clear when ecotourism will visit, what type of accommodation will be provided, a variety of meals, the location and extent of guided and unguided walks, as well as modes of transportation. This would not only allow tourists to

shop the products before acquiring them, but it would also ensure that organizers and tour operators adhere to conservation and preservation actions for the destination's present and future use. This will exert an immediate impact on eco-tourism product packaging, marketing, and market. According to Nugroho et al. (2018), developing ecotourism services includes efforts to develop local empowerment and infrastructure to meet environmental conservation, as well as building governance to gain a positive experience and well-being, as well as integrating tourism promotion through product development and market segmentation, and analysing and educating to offer cultural and environmental education.

Moreover, consumer satisfaction as a result of the planned and delivered products is critical to the success of ecotourism-related businesses. According to Gidebo (2021), managing tourist demand and satisfaction criteria is critical for any international traveller, necessitating the use of powerful information and communication technologies. This could be Internet connectivity for communication and information search, reliable and accessible reservation systems, or user-friendly online marketing platforms. In line with this, Drumm and Moore (2002) discovered that tour operators and other travel agents, whether in touch or outbound, play an important role in the coordination of various means of transportation such as aircraft, ships, vans, and buses. Therefore, if sufficient preparation is done ahead of time, tourists will be comfortable, happy, and satisfied with the service offered, while the integrity and sustainability of the ecotourism destination will be maintained. Thus, simply because tour operators are at the forefront of ecotourism planning, all activities and policies relating to quality and value addition in these places must take them into account.

Additionally, tour operators and other players must emphasize the security and conservation of ecotourism goods and destination places for the current and future utility of ecotourism. According to Noll et al. (2019), it is critical to conduct a thorough destination assessment to ensure that destinations are well protected and that all primary stakeholders, such as local community members surrounding those destination sites, understand the unique cultural, historical, and natural strengths that must be promoted and conserved. With the help of tour operators, this assessment can be completed successfully.

Furthermore, Drumm and Moore (2002) stated that incorporating private tour operators into the planning process is difficult because such projects are typically costly and encounter numerous hurdles. However, if the participation of tour operators in such planning efforts significantly reduces costs, the target can be met sooner than expected. The authors also recommend the following key inputs in the process: information provision about potential ecotourism markets; business services and

advice on available tangible and intangible products; marketing of ecotourism related programs; providing essential services for accessing and utilizing ecotourism sites; capacity building of local tour guides and entrepreneurs; and ecotourism operations and investment.

Development of ecotourism products

A tourism product, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2022), is a combination of both tangible and intangible components, such as cultural, natural, and historical attractions, whether naturally existing or man-made, as well as their associated facilities and services, which form the core of any tourism destination and a traveller's overall experience. According to Xu (2010), travellers frequently encounter a diverse selection of tourist items in different destinations. Various tourists have different requirements, expectations, preferences, perceptions, desires, and motives during their travels, as proven by Jaafar et al. (2014). Internal factors such as psychological, physical, and social communication and exploration dynamics, as well as external factors such as transportation modes, accommodation types, local community attitudes, safety status, prices, and services offered, and the historical and cultural significance of the destination, cause those differences, according to Hsu, Tsai, and Wu (2009). The authors confirm that tour operators, through various services within the ecotourism value chain, have a significant probability of influencing eco-tourist choices as a result of positive and gratifying attitudes, communication, dependable modes of transportation, lodging, and product prices. To maintain the sustainability of ecotourism in Tanzania, tour operators must have a favourable business environment for the production of good and appealing products.

Ecotourism products, like most other items on the market, rely heavily on product quality and quantity. According to Matilla (2011), the quality of a tourist product can only be determined and quantified by examining whether it meets or does not meet the expectations of tourists and other clients, who have varying expectations depending on their knowledge, prior experiences, and tagged prices. Despite the fact that most ecotourism destination sites are owned and regulated by the government, their relationships with tour operators are direct given that tour operators are responsible for product customization, segmentation, and management, ensuring that the offered services are of high quality and reflect the value for money spent. Aside that, Smith (1994) underlined the importance of quality in any ecotourism product given that it not only satisfies the travellers but also plays a significant role in product pricing. As a result, one of the main elements of tourism is corporate profitability, which also affects product

prices.

United Nations World Tourism Organization (2022) underlined that tourism product pricing must take into account all stages of the product life cycle as well as distribution channel price and that product quality must mirror product pricing in order to satisfy travellers. In this regard, tour operators have the opportunity to establish a decent price due to satisfied clients' high prices, which will contribute to the government's revenue and thus increase their ability to maintain and preserve the ecotourism attraction sites.

Promotion of ecotourism products

Ecotourism products, like other products in the market, must be communicated to potential and future customers through a variety of marketing communication channels. However, it is critical to create, build, and reinforce brands for any ecotourism destination location. This will allow for the development of unique and distinguishing features and experiences to conquer the market, ensuring eco-tourists are very satisfied with their first or repeated experience. Satisfied visitors, according to Jaafar et al. (2014), are more likely to provide positive feedback, convert to regular customers, and spread favorable word of mouth to other possible new consumers. As a result, it not only ensures customers' loyalty but also influences customer retention, which has an impact on the current and future ecotourism business.

Ecotourism promotion is a critical strategy for any destination's prosperity and success, as it may contribute to economic empowerment, local community development, and poverty alleviation, as demonstrated in Bakari (2021). As revealed by Boniface et al. (2016), marketing and promotion of ecotourism destinations by tour operators is one of the essential aspects of ensuring ecotourism sustainability because the failure of ecotourism development and management is mostly attributed to insufficient information, lack of awareness, and low creativity of the players and local community in terms of product promotion, diversification, and marketing strategies. The effectiveness of the location's marketing and promotion has a powerful and direct impact on driving tourists to any destination.

Other factors include insufficient infrastructure, an inability to manage and recognize potential in regions, a lack of awareness of local ecotourism potential, a lack of synergies of cooperation between communities, governments, and other stakeholders, and an inability to recognize the trend of people's need for tourism (Nitasha, 2018). The choice of object marketing is illustrated by three main attributes, namely local, unique, and contemporary, because it reduces the enormous effort required in the preparation of facilities and infrastructure; it differentiates the types of tours compared to other areas; and it captures the millennial generations, which

currently have a huge market potential and have more frequent travel habits than previous generations, as Simanjuntaka and Manalu (2019) describe in detail.

In the Tanzanian context, Bakari (2021) stated that major challenges affecting the country's national parks, including the Serengeti National Park, are a lack of promotion marketing packages for domestic tourism, the absence of a development and marketing policy and strategy for domestic tourism, a lack of devotion to domestic tourism from both business sectors and some government bodies, and economic challenges associated with the low country's per capita income. As a result, many aspects of ecotourism sustainability will be achieved as long as tour operators create, promote, and market ecotourism products well. Thus, government initiatives and policies to revitalize the economy and preserve ecotourism must filter down to tour companies.

Public awareness is the major concern in knowing, understanding, and implementing the ecotourism marketing plan, according to Simanjuntaka and Manalu (2019). Local officials and businesses, as well as all community groups, central government, private, and educational institutions, are expected to support the strategy's implementation.

Tour operators must play an important role in developing public knowledge on not just the beauty of ecotourism destination places but also on diverse conservation measures for future generations. By doing so, they will safely direct their business while also contributing to the sustainability of ecotourism. Experiences from other countries, such as South Africa, revealed that tour operators place a high value on innovative marketing information systems for both product awareness and as a management tool to facilitate informed managerial decisions, as evidenced in Potgieter et al. (2013).

However, the successful, efficient, and long-term marketing of ecotourism needs substantial financial commitment. As a result, the importance of financial stability for tour operators in order to engage in the necessary marketing and promotion efforts for sustainable ecotourism is emphasized. Tour operators must work hard to ensure that they have enough resources to improve their marketing capabilities. Marketing objectives can be met in this manner. Thus, in order to sustain ecotourism, tour operators must have the capacity to define, produce, convey, and deliver desired value to their target clients, as Neil et al. (2012) demonstrate.

Implementation of ecotourism products

Implementing ecotourism programs and associated products necessitates players minimizing any social, behavioral, societal, and natural repercussions while also raising cultural and environmental awareness to provide

positive experiences for both local and foreign tourists. Tanzania, on the other hand, has established ecotourism supporting policies, laws, and implementing institutions to work on the seamless implementation of ecotourism and other forms of tourism. Nonetheless, the development and advertising strategy of recruiting more domestic tourists is prioritized, particularly during the low season. However, the setback is related to the degree of coordination efforts. In the absence of it, little success in implementation efforts has been noted until recently, when the country had a provision of cultural and sporting events targeted at broadening the tourism offering and appealing to the home market. Despite these attempts, Bakari (2021) noted that such events are seasonal, impacting the sustenance and sustainability of the local tourism business. The inclusion of tour operators in the implementation strategy could help to mitigate this challenge.

As ecotourism products encompass tangible products, services, and relevant activities offered to tourists and travellers during their visit to ecotourism, tour operators play an important role in ensuring that all such activities are well planned and carried out in a very professional manner, reflecting a high level of hospitality, as also recommended by Jaafar et al. (2014). By so doing, the country will ensure a steady stream of visitors and enough funds to keep the attractions and businesses running. The accessibility of ecotourism destinations is critical for tour operators in order to attract tourists and conduct business effectively and efficiently. Therefore, governing authorities must guarantee that all plans take into account how best tour operators can implement present and future ecotourism goods?

Michael et al. (2013) stressed the necessity of tourist regulatory authorities ensuring that ecotourism benefits trickle down and are easily accessible to local populations whose livelihoods rely on the cultural and natural resources where ecotourism activities take place in a separate study. Participation of local communities and beneficiaries in ecotourism activities must be improved during implementation. Owners and workers of tour operator enterprises, as well as local communities surrounding ecotourism attraction locations, are among those who benefit.

In view of the above information, this review study affirms that ecotourism is one of the crucial aspects of economic development in Tanzania, which does not need much resource mobilization since the country is highly gifted with a number of unique natural and cultural diversity for ecotourism. However, engagement of all key players, specifically tour operators in the tourism industry, is highly encouraged. Various authors show that tour operators have a high ability to influence the sustainability of ecotourism in Tanzania simply because of their direct and close involvement in planning, development, promotion, and implementation of all ecotourism products.

The current review further establishes that in order for tour operators to contribute substantially to the

sustainability of ecotourism, they must first be existing and in operation in various ecotourism destination points. Besides, a clear and recognized organization must be established in order to oversee operations and maintain strong contact with the government as needed. Furthermore, tour operators must have strong networks of diverse companies in the fields of transportation, hotels, and accommodations. By doing so, ecotourism planning, management, consultation, monitoring, and evaluation will be carried out for present and future business needs.

In addition to that, this review study ascertains that planning of ecotourism must be emphasized at all stages within the cycle so as to be sure of how ecotourism products will be packaged, positioned, offered, and marketed for current and future generations. The roles and responsibilities of each participant at all levels of operations, whether local, ministerial, or worldwide, must be explicitly outlined, agreed upon, and integrated at the planning stages. Current and projected ecotourism products must be developed based on existing resources and customer demand, with a focus on customer happiness most of the time. Furthermore, tour operators and other stakeholders must prioritize the security and protection of ecotourism products in order to ensure that they are utilized in a sustainable manner for future generations. As a result, ecotourism product planning must go beyond the business perspective by embracing conservation and sustainability considerations.

With respect to the development of ecotourism products, tour operators need to focus on products offered with distinct tangible and intangible associated features at their best quality in order to meet tourists' perceptions, preferences, and desires so as to secure future visits and positive word of mouth to expect new customers. Besides, tour operators can sustain ecotourism through the creation and strengthening of ecotourism destination sites as well as offering them at reasonable prices that reflect their value for money. This will not only satisfy tourists but also win their loyalty.

During promotion, tour operators need to communicate all the necessary precautions towards conservation and the role of each player in maintaining the attraction sites. Moreover, all marketing efforts must align with the national tourism marketing plan and strategy. Ecotourism products require clear and effective marketing communication techniques. The targeted message must be carefully crafted and clearly presented in several languages so that the relevant audience can comprehend it. Tour operators play an important part in making this happen because they are in charge of formulating the message as well as picking marketing techniques and channels of communication. The emphasis must be effectively stated on the destination's distinctiveness, worth, and benefits to both locals and tourists. Most of the time, marketing strategies must be accompanied by what is expected from tourists and the local community in terms of conservation and preservation for future

generations.

Multi-stakeholder coordination must be highlighted and strengthened to ensure that all policies, laws, and implementing organs, regardless of their diverse functions and industries are cooperating to sustain the destination sites. With this in mind, tour operators can be actively involved in sustainability plans and initiatives as individuals or through their networks and apex organisations. A study by Patterson (2007) also emphasized the importance of including stakeholders in the creation, implementation, and monitoring of ecotourism programs, as well as being stringent about what can and cannot be done in visitation areas in order to conserve and preserve natural environments.

Conclusion

The current review study emphasizes the role of tour operators in ensuring the utility and benefits of ecotourism in Tanzania for future generations. Tour operators, who are well integrated, in particular, can contribute significantly to sustainable ecotourism by planning sound and sustainable ecotourism products, developing unique and innovative experiences from the developed and offered products, and engaging in informative and protective marketing communication. Due to their role in the implementation of ecotourism businesses, tour operators have a high chance of advocating and enhancing the sustainable implementation of any ecotourism strategy and products. These findings are crucial in making sure that Tanzania's natural and cultural endowments are carefully utilized and that, most of the time, their use for future generations in many years to come takes precedence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, the author recommends that more research should be conducted on how to best sustain ecotourism through the joint efforts of both sustainable development specialists and tour operators during strategic planning and the implementation of ecotourism products. The government machinery in the country, in addition to their regulatory function, must work more proactively with tour operators to ensure the sustainability of the existing ecotourism attractions and destinations using policies, regulations, and consultative meetings.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Determinant factors of consumers' choice of formal full service restaurants in Ghana

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The study was carried out to determine consumers' choice of formal full-service restaurants in Ghana. Survey was employed and data were collected using questionnaire. Fifty (50) consumers were selected for the study using the systematic sampling technique. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse data gathered. The findings revealed that, all the variables in the study influence consumers' choice of formal full-service restaurants. However, the most important factors in order of ranking were: food quality and taste of food, variety of menu items, product/menu price, service quality, location of restaurants, dining environment, restaurant brand popularity, prompt service, staff cooperation and parking space were major factors that influence consumers' choice of formal full service restaurants. The study further, established that consumers demographic profiles influence their choice of formal full-service restaurant. This study, the first of its kind in Ghana, is important as it is expected to expand literature on the extent of relationship between demographic factors and consumer's choice of full -service restaurant to hospitality educators and hospitality practitioners. This study recommend that hospitality operators should focus more on food quality as well as all the attributes examined in the study in order to meet the expectations of their consumers.

Key words: Consumers, formal full-service restaurants, attributes, hedonic customers, selection.

INTRODUCTION

The consumers choice of restaurant is of paramount importance to restaurateurs, as it ensures the continuity of the business. Customers come from a variety of cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds and the majority of them have completely different criteria in choosing restaurants (Chung and Kim, 2011). Therefore a deeper understanding of consumers' selection criteria provides restaurateurs with valuable information and insights that enable them to attract and retain more consumers (Jang and Namkung, 2017).

Consequently, there is a need to understand the choice factors and their relative importance that influence the decision of restaurant patrons so that restaurateurs can offer and develop strategies accordingly (Josiam and Monteiro, 2018).

According to Chung and Kim (2011), the price of a menu is one of the most important factors that determine consumer decision-making and subsequent behaviour. Kafel and Sikora (2013) claim that restaurant consumers use price as a measure of restaurant quality because

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they assume that an expensive restaurant serves better food and offers better quality. Therefore, the relative importance of restaurant choice factors differs significantly depending on restaurant price (Massawe, 2013).

The type of restaurant consumers choose to visit is another factor that influences their selection, as recognised by Hensley and Sulek (2014). Kim and Moon (2009) also, postulate that since consumers have different expectations and perceptions regarding their different dining experiences at a different type of restaurant, they also have different selection criteria when deciding where to dine. Chung and Kim (2011) contend that full-service restaurants tend to attract loyal customers who place more value on the restaurant environment, while fast-service restaurants tend to attract utilitarian customers who place value on functional benefits. The selection criterion varies depending on the type of restaurant customers want to visit (Kivela et al., 2013). Soriano (2012) claims that food quality is the other factor that influences consumers' restaurant selection behaviour. Josiam and Monteiro (2018) agree that the unique taste and ingredients of the food play an important role for consumers in choosing a restaurant. Restaurants often develop new menus and offer a variety of menu items to increase customer traffic (Mhlanga et al., 2014).

Additionally, prior research, such as Parasuraman et al. (2010), Zeithaml (2013), Rose and Thomsen (2015), Qu (2018), Josiam and Monteiro (2018) and Winer (2019) attested that the success and failure of restaurant depend on several key aspects such as price of the products, quality of the products, services provided to the customers, promotions, customer expectations, brand, physical distribution, location and taste of the food.

More so, according to Andaleeb and Conway (2016) studies in South Africa, found that formal full-service restaurants have a negative growth rate as consumers prefer to eat at fast-food restaurants. Researchers such as Ehsan (2012) and Yuncu et al. (2013) also, identify that the inability of restaurateurs to determine the key attributes that influence customers' restaurant choice as one of the major reasons for the failure of restaurants. Chung and Kim (2011) asserts that full-service restaurants are more likely to attract hedonic customers who pay more attention to restaurant environments, as compared to fast-service restaurants customers who value functional benefits.

Formal full service restaurant refers to an up market restaurant that offers table service with complete varied menus and multiple entrees for each meal period which may include soups, salads and desserts (SSA, 2013 as cited in Mhlanga et al., 2014). Most formal full service restaurants will provide customer seating with gastronomy, sophisticated service, elegant ambience and liquor service. Usually, these restaurants will not permit casual wear (Feinstein and Stefanelli, 2008). A Formal full service restaurant is characterized by offering meal courses, table service, customer seating, sophisticated

service, elegant ambience, liquor service, mostly will not permit casual wear and consumers usually expect far beyond food unlike other types of restaurant where food is considered most (Mhlanga et al., 2014).

From the foregoing literature review, there had been intensive studies on different reasons for consumers' choice of restaurant types but no study have been conducted on consumers' choice of formal full-service restaurants in Ghana.

This study therefore, seeks to determine factors that influence consumers' choice of formal full service restaurant in Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. This study, the first of its kind in Ghana, is important as it is expected to provide current data on the extent of relationship between demographic factors and consumer's choice of full -service restaurant to hospitality educators and hospitality practitioners. It is also, important that managers understand key consumers' selection criteria in order to integrate these demands into their product and service attributes to gain a competitive edge and remain sustainable. Further, a deeper understanding of consumers' selection criteria provides restaurateurs with valuable information and insights that enable them to attract and retain more consumers. This study efforts contributes to expanding literature on formal full service restaurant service quality and are suitable for international comparison which seems unknown to exist. The study is guided by the following objectives and hypothesis:

1. To identify factors that influence consumers' choice of formal full service restaurant in Ghana.
2. To determine the impact of demographic factors on the choice of full-service restaurant.

H10: There is no relationship between factors and consumers' choice of formal full service restaurant

H1A: There is a relationship between factors and consumers' choice of formal full service restaurant

H20: There is no significant relationship between demographic factors and consumers' choice of restaurant.

H2A: There is a significant relationship between demographic factors and consumers' choice of restaurant.

Factors influencing consumers choice of restaurants

Hyun (2010) carried out a study on quality of food and customer satisfaction at restaurant. The outcome of their studies revealed that food quality attributes such as taste, appearance and temperature significantly affect customer satisfaction and selection of restaurant. The findings of Hyun (2010) corroborates Fungai (2017), Qu (2018) and Mohammad (2019) studies who found that quality of food greatly influence consumers' choice of eatery.

In another study, Seyed et al. (2010) studied in twenty-two districts in the Iranian capital. Questionnaire was

used to solicit data from hundred and fifty (150) respondents. The results showed that brand popularity influenced consumers' decision on restaurant.

Oswald and Tembi (2016) set out to assess the factors that affect consumer selection criteria in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth, South African. The results of their study showed that good service, quality of food, recommendations by others and good ambience, mostly influence the selection of formal full-service restaurants.

A study by Chen and Tsai (2016) also found that location of a restaurant has been well identified as a strategic success factor for a restaurant company to remain competitive in the hospitality industry. According to Chen and Tsai (2016), location of the restaurant was found to attract customers' choice of restaurants.

Similarly, Chen and Tsai (2016) came out that consumers' variety-seeking behavior is triggered to reduce boredom during repeat purchases as well as to increase the stimulation to the desired level.

In a related study, Mehdina and Tamanna (2016) sought to study factors that influence young customers to prefer the fast food. The result revealed that low priced restaurant is dominant among respondents for their choice of regular food.

A study conducted by Raghubir and Corfman (2016) revealed that sales promotion is a strategy that marketers provide to customers to meet their financial needs, to encourage repeat purchases, product trials, and brand switching behavior. Although sales promotion provides customers with immediate financial incentives (Kivela et al., 2013), it may jeopardize a brand by diverting customers' attention away from quality and toward a temporary financial incentive.

Another study by Chen and Tsai (2016) established that more people are attempting to prioritize time savings as well as a better eating environment. These factors encourage restaurants to invest in design and create a more relaxed atmosphere for customers.

In another study, Hoffman and Bateson (2017) found that personal recommendations from family and friends are perceived as more reliable than commercial advertising media and are therefore more likely to influence positive/negative customer attitudes towards a brand. Thus, in the service industry, consumers depend on subjective ratings from family and friends owing to lack of objective means to evaluate services.

Impact of demographic factors on consumers choice of restaurant

Chan and Wong's (2005) studies found that different age groups have significant influences on accommodation selection.

Furthermore, it has been found out that education has a very strong relationship with income levels, as nearly half of the populations with higher incomes have

completed four years of college, whereas only 10% of the populations with lower incomes have done so (Peter et al., 2006). In addition, Chan and Wong (2005) discovered that factors influencing the choice of restaurants for visitors to Hong Kong with higher income were more influenced by 'restaurant brand' and 'incentive' than those with lower incomes.

In a related study, Rai (2020) set out to examine the impact of demographic factors on purchase intention of consumers. The results showed that, there is no significant difference between male and female attitudes to purchasing intentions. The findings also established that there is a significant difference on purchase intentions among different levels of education.

However, Rai (2020) study, contradicted Jain and Sharma (2012) studies where they found out that gender positively influenced consumers' choice of buying decisions.

In another study, Chan and Wong (2009) found that consumers from various demographics, such as age, educational level, and income level, may have different needs and expectations on important factors when making restaurant purchase decisions.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. Figure 1 shows the map of Brong-Ahafo which is shaded red. It has 27 administrative districts. Each district is divided functionally into sub-districts. Sunyani was the regional capital of Brong - Ahafo region at the time of the study.

In this study, a survey was adopted because the respondents were out there to be reached. The target population was composed of the reachable consumers of the full-service restaurant in Bono and Ahafo regions of Ghana.

Systematic sampling technique was employed in this study. Systematic sampling method is the process of selecting a sample from a population list in an orderly manner but not randomly. The units in the population are arranged serially and then a random number is chosen to start the selection of the sample till the sample size is obtained (Kuranchie, 2021). Consequently, systematic sampling technique was used to select 50 consumers of every fifth consumer who walked into the restaurant after they were seated until the sample size for a particular restaurant was reached. This approach was possible since the researchers had a complete list of the target population of all types of restaurants and accommodation establishments with their names, addresses and telephone numbers from the hotel directory (GTA, 2018). To arrive at 50 consumers, the researchers have to select every n^{th} element in the population after calculating the sampling fraction (k). Thus, $k=N/n$, where N is the total population and n is the sample size. In this study, the population is made up of 250 consumers and the intended sample is 50, it is $= 250/50 = 5$. So, the 5th interval is used in selecting the names in the study.

Having sought permission from each of the restaurant managers to conduct the study in their premises. The researchers approached the consumers after they had been seated and delivered questionnaires to them. The questionnaires covered demographic profile of the respondents and factors that influence their choice of formal full restaurant. The researchers validated the questionnaires by given it to colleagues with good knowledge in the subject area for their scrutiny and comments. Feedback was given on each of

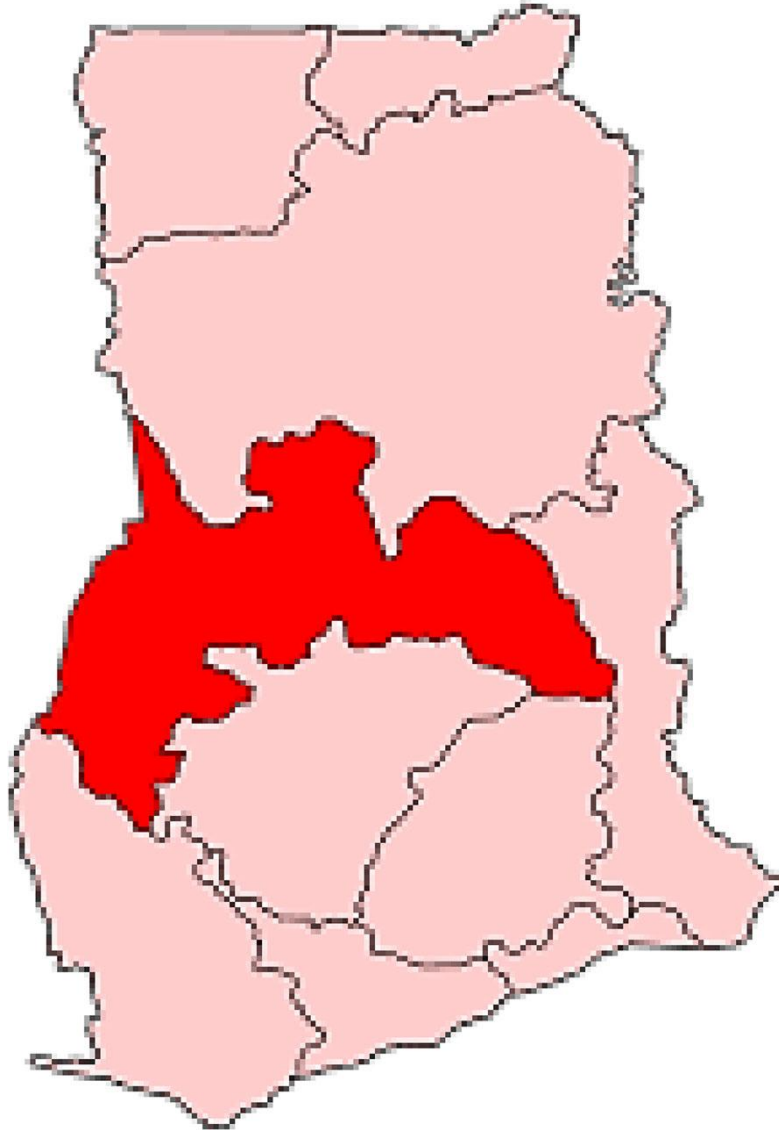


Figure 1. Map of Ghana showing Bono-Ahafo region.
Source: Adopted from FAO/WHO (2005).

the items; this led to the revision and modification of the questionnaires thereby enhancing the overall validity of this study.

The aim of the study was explained to the consumers and asked to participate if they so wished. It was emphasised that the researcher would treat the information provided as confidential and anonymous. Consumers who were willing to participate in the study received a questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked and discussed with the respondents in case of any queries. The data were captured and analysed using the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS v. 25) which is a statistical analysis software programme capable of generating descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 present demographic profile of participants. The

results show that 24 of the male customers had been patronizing the restaurant for less than 1 year while no female customer had patronized the restaurant for less than 1 year. Again, 11 of the male customers had been patronizing the restaurant for 1-2 years with only 1 of the female customers had been patronizing the restaurant for 1-2 years. However, 10 of the female customers had been patronizing the restaurant for 3-4 years while 4 had been patronizing the restaurant for more than 5 years with no male customer patronizing the restaurants within these periods. With regard to age range, 30 male customers were aged between 20-29 years, 1 female and 5 male customers were aged between 30-39 years. However, 10 female customers were aged between 40-49 years while 4 of them were aged above 50 years with

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants (N=50).

Variable	Gender		Grand total
	Female	Male	
Number of years patronizing			
<1	0	24	24
1-2	1	11	12
3-4	10	0	10
≥5	4	0	4
Age range			
20 -29	0	30	30
30-39	1	5	6
40-49	10	0	10
≥50+	4	0	4
Marital status			
Married	12	0	12
Single	3	35	38
Educational level			
Degree	12	0	12
DIP/HND	3	25	28
SHS	0	10	10

Source: Field Survey (2021).

Table 2. Tabulation of gender and age and education and marital status and patronizing.

Variable	Categories		
Gender	2		
Age	4		
Education	3		
Marital sStatus	2		
Patronizing	4		
Test statistics	df	Value	Prob
Pearson X ²	181	4902.485	0.0000
Likelihood ratio G2	181	258.9395	0.0001

Source: Field Survey (2021).

no male customer was aged within these age categories. Concerning marital status, 12 female customers were married, 3 females and 35 males were single. The implication is that none of the male customers had married. In terms of educational background, 12 female customers had attained degree with no male having degree education. In addition, 3 females and 25 males had attained HND/Diploma education while 10 males had attained Senior High School education. Table 2 show the tabulation of gender and age and education and marital status and patronizing.

It is observed that the chi square value obtained (P=0.0000) is less than 0.05, indicating there is

statistically difference among the categories.

From Table 3, the mean (3.65) indicates that the variables identified are possible factors that can influence consumers' selection of restaurants. Majority of the consumers agreed (mean=3.76) that restaurant brand popularity influences consumers' selection of full-service restaurants. This finding is supported by Seyed et al. (2010) studies that found restaurant brand as the factor that significantly affects consumers' choice of restaurant. The implication is that when choosing a restaurant consumers consider the brand popularity.

Consumers agreed (mean=3.87) that food quality and taste influence consumers' selection of full-service

Table 3. Consumers choice of full - Service restaurant.

Consumer choice of full - service restaurant	Mean	Std. Dev.
Restaurant brand popularity	3.76	0.88
Food quality and taste	3.87	0.74
Personal or past experience with a restaurant	3.61	1.10
Product/menu price	3.80	0.78
Staff cooperation	3.67	1.12
Location of the restaurant	3.78	0.81
Brand reputation from restaurant	3.70	0.83
Service quality	3.79	0.82
Variety of menu items	3.82	0.77
Parking space	2.48	1.14
Dining environment	3.77	0.84
Prompt/quick service	3.74	0.89
Average mean	3.65	

Source: (Field survey, 2021), Scale: 1.0-2.4=Disagree, 2.5-3.9=Agree.

restaurants. The finding is supported by Mohammed (2019) who found that consumers are more concerned about food quality. This implies that the quality of food highly influenced consumers' choice of full service restaurant.

Consumers further, agreed (mean=3.80) that menu price influences their selection of restaurants. The finding corroborates Winer (2019) study which found that price of a product influenced consumers' choice of restaurants. The implication is that price is an important factor in consumers' choice, especially for low-income consumers.

Further, consumers agreed (mean=3.67) that staff cooperation influences consumer selection of full service restaurants. The results of this study support Adekola and Bola (2012) studies who found that a good customer-staff relationship influences customer decision to purchase hotel products and repeat visits. The implication of this result is that good customer-staff relationships can influence customer decision to repeat visit to the restaurant.

Moreso, consumers agreed (mean=3.78) that location is a factor that influence consumers' choice. The finding strengthen Davis et al. (2012) studies who observed that the location of the service providers and their accessibility are a very important selling point in the restaurant industry. The implication is that when choosing a full service restaurant, consumers evaluate the distance between their home as well as work place.

Furthermore, most of the consumers agreed (mean=3.70) that brand reputation of restaurants influences their selection of the restaurant. The finding is in line with Rose and Thomsen (2015) studies that found that brand reputation reflects a mixture of reliability, admiration, goodwill, respect and trust of a brand.

Consumers further, agreed (M=3.79) that service

quality is a factor that influences consumer choice of full service restaurant. The result corroborate Oswald and Tembi (2016) studies who found that good quality service influence consumers' choice of full service restaurant in South Africa. This implies that staff service significantly influences consumer's choice of restaurants.

Consumers again agreed (mean=3.82) that the variety of menu items is a factor that influences consumer selection of restaurants. When selecting restaurants, consumers may choose a restaurant that offers a variety of menu items (Prayag et al., 2012).

The dining environment influences consumer selection of restaurants as agreed (mean=3.77) by most of the consumers involved in the study. The finding of the study is in line with Pizam and Ellis (2016) studies that found that when the dining environment possesses unpleasant levels, it is easily noticed by customers, such as soiled tables, warm temperature, chipped crockery and noisy staff leading to dissatisfaction. The implication is that the restaurant's dining environment determines consumers' choice of patronage.

Finally, consumers agreed (mean=3.74) that prompt service influences consumers' choice of full -service restaurants. The result is similar to the findings of Lau et al. (2013) studies who found that prompt service delivery had a statistically significant influence on consumer choices of restaurants. This implies that consumers consider speedy service delivery while selecting full-service restaurants.

Generally, the mean value (mean=3.73) indicates that demographic factors have an impact on consumers' choice of full-service restaurants. Majority of the consumers agreed (mean=3.77) that taste of food is linked to the age of the consumer. As people get older, their senses of smell and taste shift. Between the ages of 40 and 50, the number of taste buds diminishes, and the

Table 4. Perceived impact of demographic factors on consumers' choice of full- service restaurant.

Perceived Impact of demographic factors on consumers' choice of restaurant	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tastes of food and restaurants are frequently linked to the age of the customer	3.77	1.04
Different age groups have significant influences on restaurant selection factors	3.68	1.10
Education levels may influence how consumers make purchasing decisions	3.80	0.94
Different educational backgrounds influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards the choice of restaurant	3.78	1.01
The marital status of customers influences the choice of restaurant	3.70	1.06
How long customers patronize restaurants influences their choice	3.64	1.13
The gender of the customer (male/female) influences the choice of restaurant	3.74	1.12
Average mean	3.73	

Source: (Field survey, 2021), Scale: 1.0-2.4=Disagree, 2.5-3.9=Agree.

Table 5. Regression model summary.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate
1	0.890	0.824	0.502	0.214

Dependent variable: restaurant. Predictors: (constant): Restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment, and prompt service.

remaining ones begin to shrivel, losing crucial mass (Gibson, 2015). Consumers agreed (mean=3.80 and 3.78) that educational levels may influence how consumers make purchasing decisions and different educational backgrounds influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards the choice of restaurant, respectively (Table 4).

Similar effects have been observed for educational levels: individuals with higher education have reported greater influences on the choice of restaurants to dine in (Kibue, 2013). According to Korir (2015), people with higher education consider the brand popularity and reputation of the restaurant when deciding on the choice of the restaurant. The implication is that consumer level of education influence the choice of restaurant. In addition, consumers agreed (mean=3.70) that the marital status of customers influences the choice of restaurant. This finding is supported by Skoyen et al. (2013) studies who found that single people significantly influenced the choice of the restaurant over married people. Consumers agreed (mean=3.74) that the gender of the customer (male/female) influences the choice of restaurant. Gender appears to have a pervasive influence on consumers' choice of restaurant. Women tend to take more responsibility for restaurant and food selection than men (Umberson, 2016).

Regression analysis results

Since the measures used to assess the primary constructs in the model are quantitative scales, multiple

regression analysis was conducted on factors that influence consumers' choice of full service restaurants. The results is presented in Table 5.

From Table 5, R-value is 0.890 which is a positive direction of R is the correlation between the observed and predicted values of the dependent variable. The values of R range from -1 to 1 (Saunders et al., 2012). The sign of R indicates the direction of the relationship (positive or negative). The absolute value of R indicates the strength, with larger absolute values indicating stronger relationships. For example, the R-value of 0.890 indicates a stronger relationship between observed and predicted values in the positive direction. The value of the coefficient of determination R^2 was 0.824, indicating that 82.4% of the variance in the dependent variable (Restaurant) was explained and predicted by independent variables (restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location of the restaurant, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment, and prompt service).

The ANOVA in Table 6 indicates that the overall model was a good fit since (F-value=22.970 and p-value=0.000<0.05). This implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between the restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment, prompt service and choice of restaurant.

The t-value of constant produced (t = 1.103) was significant at 95% level (Sig. F<0.05), thus confirming the fitness of the model. Food quality, taste and product price were found to have a positive linearly significant

Table 6. Analysis of variance for factors influencing consumers' choice of restaurant.

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	44.991	7	14.970	22.970	0.000
Residual	97.795	52	0.652		
Total	142	60			

Dependent variable: Restaurant. Predictors: (constant): Restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment, and prompt service.

Table 7. Regression coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.283	3.558		1.103	0.274
Food quality and taste	0.389	0.085	0.404	4.601	0.000
Brand reputation	0.205	0.084	0.283	2.436	0.016
Location	0.198	0.065	0.218	3.040	0.003
Brand popularity	0.138	0.066	0.200	2.095	0.038
Product price	0.327	0.022	0.168	2.458	0.000
Service quality	0.447	0.039	0.387	3.659	0.032
Dining environment	0.328	0.048	0.210	4.438	0.004
Variety of menu items	0.460	0.068	0.306	2.564	0.012
Prompt service	0.149	0.059	0.204	3.088	0.040
Staff cooperation	0.364	0.047	0.410	4.208	0.020

Dependent variable: Restaurant; Predictors: (constant): Restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment, and prompt service.

influence on the choice of restaurant ($\beta=0.389$, $p=0.000<0.05$ and $\beta=0.327$, $p=0.000<0.05$). However, at 5% level of significance and 95% level of confidence, brand reputation, location of the restaurant, brand popularity, service quality, dining environment, variety of menu items, prompt service and staff cooperation with p-values of 0.016, 0.003, 0.038, 0.032, 0.004, 0.012, 0.040, 0.020, respectively, and therefore, their coefficients should be retained in the final model. The beta coefficients indicate the relative importance of each independent variable (restaurant brand popularity, food quality and taste, product/menu price, staff cooperation, location, brand reputation, service quality, variety of menu items, dining environment and prompt service) in influencing the dependent variable (restaurant). Table 7 show the regression coefficients.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to determine factors that influence consumers' choice of full service restaurants in Ghana. The findings conveyed that, all the variables identified in the study influence consumers' choice of

formal full-service restaurants. However, the most important factors in order of ranking were: food quality and taste of food, variety of menu items, product/menu price, service quality, location of restaurants, dining environment, restaurant brand popularity, prompt service, staff cooperation and parking space were major factors that influence consumers' choice of formal full service restaurants.

The study further, established that consumers demographic profile influence their choice of formal full-service restaurant. This study would assist hospitality operators to understand current factors that consumers give importance to when choosing formal full-service restaurant and thereby develop appropriate strategies that attract and retain all consumers. Hence, it addresses the paucity of literature in the study area of hospitality operation with regard to current needs of consumers' choice of formal full-service restaurant in Ghana.

Recommendations

This study recommend that hospitality operators should focus more on food quality as well as all the attributes

examined in the study in order to meet the expectations of their consumers. Additional qualitative studies can be conducted based on this study to have a further and an in depth analysis of consumers' choice of formal full-service restaurant.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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