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Evaluating Stakeholder Feedback on Gurara Waterfalls: Insights into its Cultural Connection

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Abstract

Recreation centres worldwide serve as prominent attractions, offering visitors opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment. Within the continuously growing hospitality industry, there is significant potential for international investment and foreign exchange. This study delves into the cultural significance of Gurara Waterfalls by evaluating stakeholder feedback. Employing a quantitative research method, the study utilized a virtual survey to gather data from 170 inhabitants of the Minna-Abuja environs. The primary focus of the questionnaire was to unravel the intricate tapestry of visitors' experiences at Gurara Waterfalls. Through a meticulous analysis of prevalent issues, captivating features, and overall emotional responses, the aim was to investigate the untapped potentials of cultural tourism embedded in this natural wonder. The practical implications of user perceptions on Gurara Waterfall and its surrounding facilities are presented. The findings from this research provide valuable insights into the cultural connections surrounding Gurara Waterfalls, shedding light on opportunities for enhancing the visitor experience and unlocking the latent cultural tourism prospects associated with this captivating natural site. As a recommendation, further research should explore creative and innovative structures for Gurara Waterfalls and other Nigerian tourist destinations, aiming to create, sustain and increase cultural tourist interest and overall visitor satisfaction.

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Introduction

According to Richards (2000), nature and culture cannot be separated, and concepts of sustainability should include cultural sustainability. Mousavi et al. (2016) argued that cultural tourism can support national identity, create alternative cultural experiences, and promote new images for communities. The development of preserved landscapes and national parks often relies on funding from tourists (Richards, 2000). Macleod (2006) also recognized the societal drawbacks and difficulties linked to the commercialization of culture facilitated by tourism. Mousavi et al. (2016) noted the close relationship between identity and cultural tourism in the context of globalization and individualism. The intricate connection between culture and nature in tourism involves the transformation and replication of natural landscapes by culture, while tourism culture influences both cultural and natural landscapes (Taylor & Lennon, 2011; Agnoletti, 2014; Buckley, 2018). Chen and Rahman (2018) emphasized the significance of culture in tourism and underscored the necessity for a precise definition of cultural tourism. Mousavi et al. (2016) raised concerns about how the commodification of cultural products and the consumption of local identity by tourists can impact both tourists and local communities. Preservation efforts are subject to cultural struggles between different types of tourists and consumers (Richards, 2000).

This study delves into the realm of tourism, a multifaceted social activity encompassing leisure and business aspects, while acknowledging its potential to significantly impact a country's image (Omon, 2014). The intricacies of tourism extend to its intricate interplay with landscapes, involving ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions, as highlighted by Dorcas (2012), aligning with the perspective of Omon (2014). Nevertheless, the vast potential of tourist sites in Nigeria remains largely untapped, as emphasized by Olawuyi and Alabi (2018). Nyong and Inyang (2018) shed light on the necessity of fortifying the tourism industry in Nigeria, underscoring the importance of infrastructure, such as well-constructed roads, in providing accessibility to these sites. Notably, Odoh et al. (2020) illuminate the symbiotic relationship between tourism and architecture, with the design and construction of buildings playing a pivotal role in environmental protection and conservation, thus catalysing the tourism sector.

When contemplating built spaces in tourist-centric locales, it becomes essential to scrutinize the factors influencing building performance. This scrutiny unearths concerns voiced by Ogunde et al. (2017) pertaining to client engagement in decision-making, provision of substandard materials, design errors, and ineffective communication, which can collectively impact the ultimate performance of a building. On the construction front, Aliyu et al. (2015) posit that the recognition and inclusion of quality in the finished project, construction costs, and construction time are critical factors exerting a substantial influence on the construction of facilities. Abiodun et al. (2017) underscore the paramount importance

of safety and security as fundamental performance criteria, surpassing indoor air quality, building integrity, thermal performance, spatial performance, visual performance, and acoustic performance.

The broader picture that emerges from this intricate interplay of tourism, building performance, and assessment tools is that well-structured tourist facilities and accessible roads are pivotal to the success of tourist sites (Nyong & Inyang, 2018). In this context, the current study endeavours to shed light on the most frequently cited issues, captivating attributes, and the overall emotions evoked by Gurara Waterfalls as a tourist destination, providing a comprehensive examination of the visitor experience. The significance of this research extends to its potential to inform and enhance the tourism industry, offering valuable insights for site management and the development of tourist facilities.

Literature Review

The existing literature provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding visitor experiences in tourist sites and the interrelated factors. It underscores the importance of sustainable development in the context of tourism in Nigeria, which can enhance the overall experience for potential tourists (Dorcas, 2012). Bernaki & Marso (2023) emphasized the importance of understanding the main drivers of tourist experiences in destinations for managing and delivering satisfying experiences. Duarte (2012) explored various contemporary perspectives on tourist experiences, including dark tourism, experiencing poor places, sport tourism, and the role of sharing experiences through writing and social media. Lee (2015) focused specifically on historic sites and museums, developing a scale to measure tourists' experiences in these contexts, including dimensions such as entertainment, culture identity-seeking, education, relationship development, and escapism. Kempiak (2017) examined the visitor experience at heritage sites, highlighting factors such as audio and visual communication, atmospherics, on-site engagement, information, and heritage preservation that influence the experience. Visitor experiences in tourist sites are multifaceted in nature and the importance of understanding and managing these experiences to meet tourists' needs.

Visitor experiences at tourist sites are influenced by a multitude of factors, some of which contribute positively to their enjoyment, while others may detract from the experience. Phota et al. (2015) examined visitors' perceptions of tourism impacts and finds that visitors recognize the positive impacts of tourism, such as increasing income and employment opportunities, but also perceive negative impacts like changes to the natural landscape and visual pollution.

Sustainable practices in tourism, as emphasized by Dorcas (2012), are vital for creating a positive visitor experience. Sustainable development ensures that tourist sites are well-preserved and environmentally friendly, contributing to the overall enjoyment of tourists. Ijeomah et al. (2019) noted that well-managed tourist sites create a positive experience for visitors. Proper management includes

maintaining the site, providing essential facilities, and ensuring the safety and security of tourists. Economic prosperity in the region can enhance the overall visitor experience by improving infrastructure and services as highlighted by Ndajiya et al. (2014).

Kim (2020) identified various destination attributes that can result in negative tourism experiences, including safety, price, quality of service, and cultural factors. Reyes & Dael (2023) explored the influence of destination image and tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty, highlighting the importance of managing destination perception and providing top-notch tourist experiences to foster loyalty. Pavesi et al. (2016) investigated the effects of a negative travel experience on tourists' decision-making, showing that negative experiences can shape individuals' future destination selection criteria. Global warming, as noted by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA, 2023), can lead to disruptions and discomfort at tourist sites. Increased temperatures and irregular weather patterns may negatively affect the visitor experience by making conditions less than ideal. Climate change can harm the natural environment surrounding tourist sites, impacting ecosystems and the aesthetics of these areas, as explained by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA, 2022). This environmental degradation can detract from the visitor experience.

Destination attributes, tourism impacts, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and negative experiences, are all important in shaping visitors' overall experience and behaviour in tourist centres. Visitor experiences at tourist sites are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Positive factors such as sustainability, proper management, economic contribution, and sound building performance assessments contribute to enhanced experiences. On the other hand, negative factors including climate change, environmental impact, energy consumption, site consistency, and reliance on energy-intensive systems can diminish the visitor experience.

Tourist Destinations

Case studies of tourist destinations that have successfully implemented sustainable practices could offer insights into the benefits and challenges of such initiatives. Tourist destinations have some relationship with nature and local cultural factors to enhance visitor experiences (Mazilu & Ispas, 2009; Chockalingam & Ganesh, 2010; Rajeev & Shyju, 2008). Openable windows, cross ventilation, or other passive design features reduce energy consumption and enhance visitor comfort thereby functioning as passive cooling systems for tourist destinations (Hanan, 2013).

Migi Mahendra & Althalets (2022) examined the influence of tourist development on the interest of tourist visits, finding that attractions, amenities, and ancillary factors positively affect interest, while accessibility has a negative effect. Sardak et al. (2020) focused on the development of historical and cultural tourist destinations, providing theoretical and practical recommendations for their positive

social, managerial, organizational, and economic development. Liow (2022) explained that Tourist walkability has the latent possibility to change how the travelling public moves around tourist destinations. Tourist destinations have to address sustainability, climate change, energy efficiency, and other factors to enhance the visitor experience and protect the environment.

Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020), Gkika (2017), Haarhoff (2018), as well as Nihalani & Mathur (2012) collectively suggest that visitor perceptions play a significant role in shaping the success of tourist sites. Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020) found that the affective component of destination image is more relevant than the cognitive component in influencing tourist satisfaction at a heritage site. Nihalani & Mathur (2012) emphasized the significance of tourist perspectives on attractions, access, social experiences, and emotional states in marketing heritage sites effectively. Visitor perceptions have a crucial role in shaping the success of tourist sites.

Cultural Tourism in West-Africa

Cultural tourism in West Africa has undergone significant progress in recent years, reflecting the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the region (Csapo, 2012). West Africa, with its vibrant history, traditional art, music, and festivals, has become an increasingly attractive destination for tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences (Catalani, 2013; Richards & Wilson, 2006). Countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Mali have made substantial efforts to promote and preserve their cultural heritage, contributing to the growth of cultural tourism in the region. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, heritage sites, and museums have played a crucial role in showcasing the unique traditions of West Africa, drawing visitors from around the world (Fyanka & Nwoko, 2015; Van Beek & Schmidt, 2012; Ayibadeinyefa, 2011; Mew, 2016; Timothy, 2023; Ayeni, 2012; Shackley, 1997).

Moreover, the integration of technology and digital platforms has further propelled the progress of cultural tourism in West Africa. Online platforms and virtual tours have provided a means for people to explore West African cultures remotely, fostering global interest and awareness (Bisschoff, 2017; Permatasari et al., 2020; Mkono, 2018; Elkhwesky, et al. 2022). Governments and local communities recognize the economic and socio-cultural benefits of cultural tourism, leading to continued investments in infrastructure, preservation, and marketing efforts (Kleist & Bjarnesen, 2023; Permatasari et al., 2020; Meyer, 2004; Mkono, 2018). As West Africa positions itself as a key player in the global tourism landscape, the region's commitment to sustaining and promoting its cultural assets continues to be a driving force behind the progress of cultural tourism.

Methodology

The research design for this study employs a quantitative approach, primarily utilizing questionnaires as the primary data collection method. To gather data, a virtual survey was conducted to facilitate broader participation and gather diverse perspectives, involving 120 respondents from the Minna to Abuja environs particularly; Bosso Local Government Area, Chanchaga Local Government Area, Paikoro Local Government Area, Gurara Local Government Area and Gwagwalada Area Council (Figure 1), as well as 50 questionnaires administered in random areas of Niger state, specifically Minna (located in Bosso and Chanchaga L.G.As) and Suleja (located in Gurara L.G.A), based on factors such as literacy levels and proximity to the study area. Using a confidence level of 95%, population proportion of 50%, from a population estimated at 1,171,200 people (Table 1) and a margin of error of 7.52%, A total of 170 questionnaires were administered.

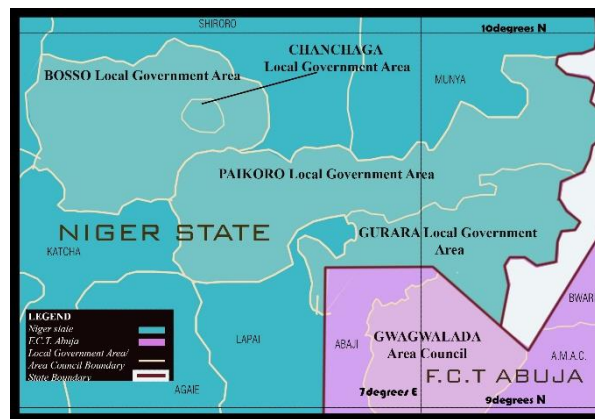


Figure 1. Marked sampled places

Table 1. Population of sampled places (Source: City population)

Area	Location	Estimated Population
Bosso Local Government Area	Niger state	254,100
Chanchaga Local Government Area	Niger state	143,900
Paikoro Local Government Area	Niger state	271,300
Gurara Local Government Area	Niger state	155,900
Gwagwalada Area Council	F.C.T. Abuja	346,000

The questionnaires are divided into three sections. Through the questionnaire, data was collected on the demographic information about Gurara Waterfalls visitors, the extent of the attraction's popularity, and the experiences of the visitors. The primary objective was to unravel the complex layers of visitors'

experiences at Gurara Waterfalls, focusing on prevalent issues, captivating features, and overall emotional responses. The research method involved the design and distribution of a structured questionnaire, strategically crafted to elicit specific information regarding the cultural significance of Gurara Waterfalls. The collected data were then subjected to meticulous analysis to draw out insights into the cultural connections surrounding Gurara Waterfalls. Practical implications of user perceptions on Gurara Waterfall and its facilities were presented based on the findings. Data analysis involved quantitative methods, including statistical analyses and data visualization techniques, to derive insights from the responses obtained through the questionnaires. The target audience for this survey includes tourists who have visited Gurara Waterfalls and residents of the Minna-Abuja environs. This approach ensured a comprehensive evaluation of the visitor experience and provides valuable insights for future development and enhancements of the site. The results from this study were presented and discussed through the aid of tables, charts and figures.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ayuba (2016a) and Idris & Umar (2017) Suggested the unique and distinctive identity of the Gbagyi/Gbari group, drawing arguments from scholars including Stuart Hall, Paul Ricoeur, and Henri Tajfel, and ethnographic interviews as traceable to their Knunu (which is the Gbagyi/Gbari language) in Gbagyi/Gbari attitudes and behaviors and their the self-perception. Ayuba (2016b) agrees with Mai & Shamsuddin (2012) that the characters, transformation, and motivation in the housing of the Gbagyi for example is influenced by cultural, behavioral, socio-economic, and spatial factors. Idris & Umar (2017) highlights the negative effects of this new knowledge system, such as the undermining of the Gbagyi's humanity and the creation of a false sense of importance.

The Gurara water falls is located in Gurara local government area Niger state along the Minna-Abuja road at the longitude 9°18'47"N and latitude 7°01'09"E (Figure 2), this local government area contains the Gbagyi people (Baba, 2012; People's Daily, 2014). Gurara Waterfalls approximately spans about 300 meters across and 30metres in height and was discovered in 1745 by a Gbagyi hunter called Buba, before the Europeans discovered it in 1925 and made it a recreation centre (Hassan, 2018). Oral history also has it that Gurara Waterfalls and Gurara River were named after two gods called Gura and Rara (Hassan, 2018).

The water flow at the Gurara water fall is at its peak between April and November, and at its lowest between January and March which is when the dry season of its location lasts. The Gurara waterfall spans 300m in width and 50m in height (Plate1, Business day, 2016). A sit out (Plate 2) houses some activities which visitors and tourists engage in at the waterfall include swimming and picnicking. There

is no organized electricity distribution and water supply infrastructural facility within the waterfall as observed.

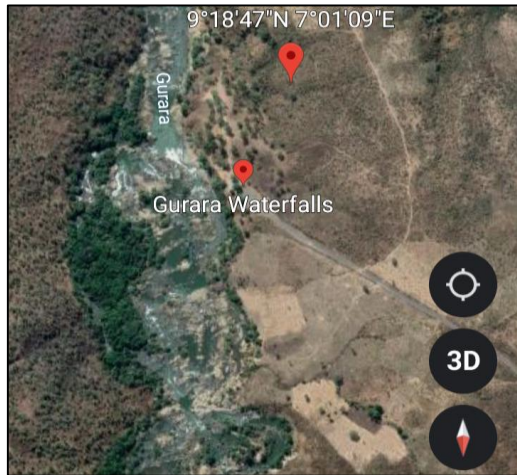


Figure 2. Gurara water falls (Source: Google Earth)



Plate 1. the Gurara water falls



Plate 2. A shed in the locations for relaxation and in-gathering

Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the preferences and priorities of the surveyed population regarding potential built facilities for a recreation centre. Notably, the preferences are categorized into four levels of necessity, ranging from "Very necessary" to "not necessary." For instance, 31% of respondents deemed a cinema "Very necessary," while 76% expressed the same level of importance for having drinks and refreshments with a bar. The figure illustrating the surveyed population's priorities and preferences in terms of amenities for a recreation centre associated with Gurara Waterfalls. The prevalent issues identified in the Gurara waterfalls include insufficient infrastructure (50%), safety

concerns (55%), and hydrophobia (50%), they carry significant implications for visitor experiences. Addressing infrastructure and safety concerns is crucial, as half of the respondents express these worries, which could otherwise detract from the overall visitor experience. Moreover, catering to the needs of the 50% of respondents with hydrophobia can significantly enhance the comfort of a considerable portion of the visiting population. On the flip side, the survey results highlight exciting features that visitors find appealing. Restaurants (83%), drinks and refreshments (73%), outdoor park facilities (77%), and indoor games (73%) are deemed most exciting by the majority of respondents. These features, categorized as amenities and recreational options, play a vital role in enhancing the site's overall appeal. The high percentages of respondents expressing excitement about these features underscore their significance in attracting and retaining visitors, providing opportunities for relaxation, entertainment, and social interaction.

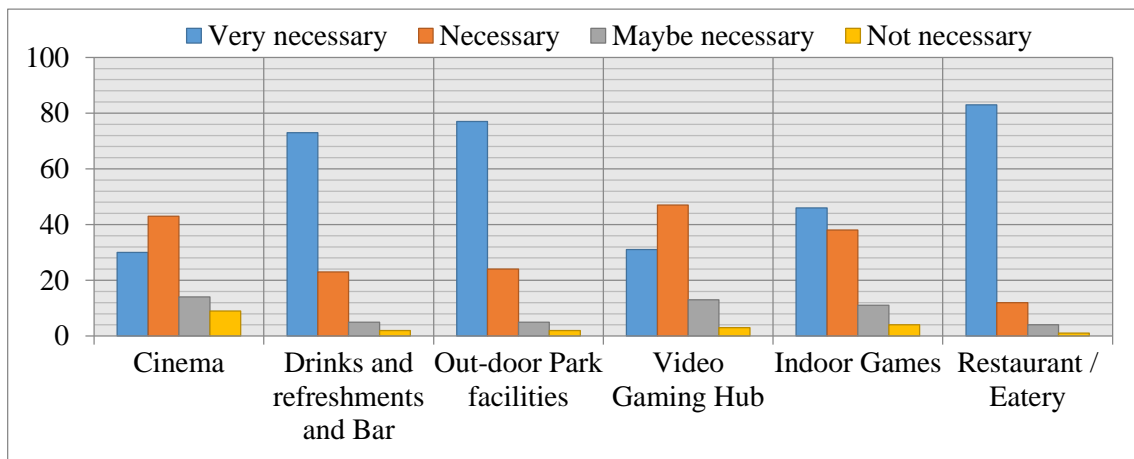


Figure 3. Possible built facilities for a recreation center

Figure 4 shedding light on the level of attraction and accommodation preferences of visitors to the Gurara waterfalls tourist site. Notably, 69% of respondents expressed a strong attraction, while 10% indicated no attraction, and 22% were uncertain or had mixed feelings. In terms of accommodation, 14% preferred on-site accommodations, 59% did not require accommodations, and 28% were open to the idea. This figure gives representation of visitors' sentiments, offering valuable insights for site management and future planning to enhance the overall visitor experience at Gurara Waterfalls. Visitor emotions, as revealed by the survey, further contribute to the understanding of their overall satisfaction with the site. The study identifies common emotional responses such as attraction (72%) and disbelief in Gurara Waterfall as a sleepover destination (57%). These emotions directly impact overall visitor satisfaction, with positive emotions enhancing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive

recommendations. However, the high percentage (57%) of visitors not considering Gurara Waterfall suitable for a sleepover indicates a potential area for improvement in site management practices.

Figure 4. Attraction to the Gurara waterfalls tourist site

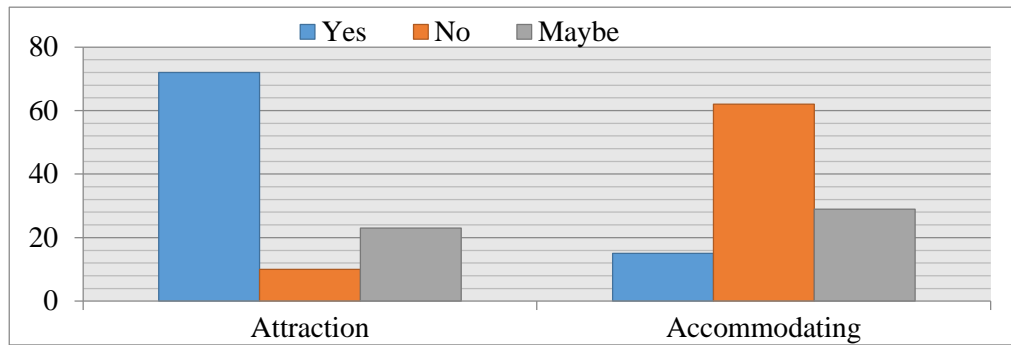
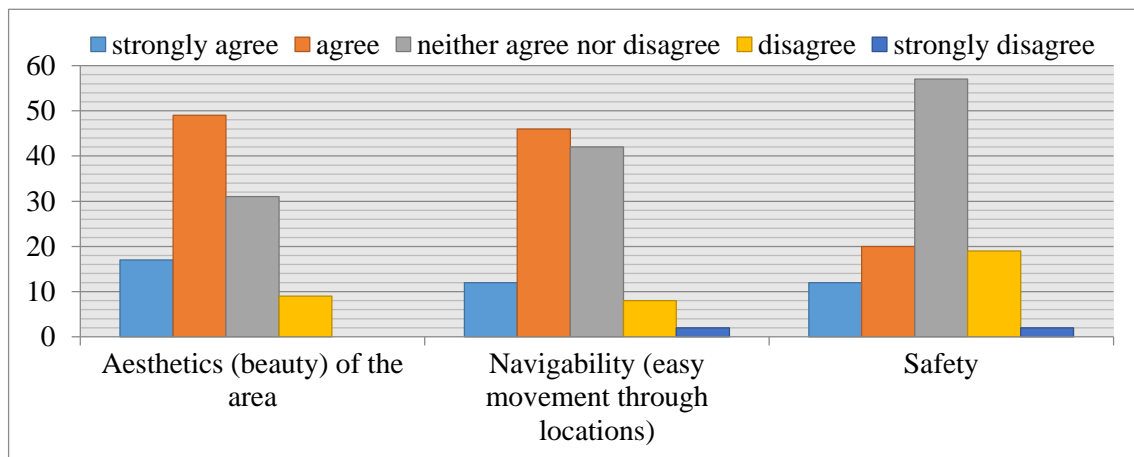


Figure 5 serves as a key component in this analysis, offering a nuanced perspective on visitors' opinions and sentiments across different aspects of the Gurara waterfalls tourist site. The responses to categories such as "Aesthetics (beauty) of the area" and "Navigability (easy movement through locations)" reflect



positive sentiments, indicating the attractiveness and ease of movement at the site. However, the responses related to "Safety" reveal some ambivalence, with 54% of visitors expressing neither agreement nor disagreement. This nuanced insight helps gauge the overall appeal of the site and identifies areas that may require attention and improvement, providing valuable guidance for enhancing the visitor experience at Gurara Waterfalls. To address these issues, and enhance the visitor experience, some measures encouraged by the respondents include improving navigation, aesthetics, and safety measures to cater to the concerns of 55% of visitors.

Figure 5. Interest and attraction to the Gurara waterfalls tourist site

Additionally, offering a variety of amenities, such as restaurants, drinks and refreshments, outdoor park facilities, and indoor games, is crucial to catering to diverse visitor preferences. Potential improvements

may involve infrastructure upgrades, guided tours, and educational materials to engage visitors with informative and entertaining experiences, significantly enhancing their time at Gurara Waterfalls and addressing the concerns expressed by a substantial portion of the visitor population.

Conclusions

As concerning the importance of the Gurara waterfalls to the unique Gbagyi culture to Cultural tourism, it brings in both economic growth and cultural sustenance. Sanni (2009), pointed out there is a positive correlation between the hospitality industry and the Nigerian economy. Hence, the stability and growth of the economy are crucial for the relevance and profitability of the hospitality industry as Economic factors such as GDP growth and international economic conditions have a direct impact on the hospitality industry.

The literature on visitor experiences at tourist sites offers a comprehensive understanding of the key factors influencing these experiences, as underlined by Dorcas (2012), Ijeomah et al. (2019) NASA (2023) and the US EPA (2022) in the contexts of sustainable development practices, Proper site management respectively, climate change and its environmental impacts, Destination attributes, tourism impacts, and the perceptions of visitors, these were also noted by Migi Mahendra & Althalets (2022), Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020), Gkika (2017), Haarhoff (2018), as well as Nihalani & Mathur (2012), as playing essential roles in shaping the success of tourist sites, aligning with the literature's perspective. The findings of this study delved into the specific findings related to Gurara Waterfalls, highlighting infrastructure and safety concerns as significant issues potentially affecting the overall visitor experience. This also underscored the allure of amenities like restaurants, drinks, outdoor park facilities, and indoor games as exciting features that positively impact site appeal.

The results of this study agreed with the literature reviewed which underscores the multifaceted nature of visitor experiences at the tourist site, where a combination of positive factors like sustainability and proper management, consistent with Dorcas (2012) and Ijeomah et al. (2019), contribute to enhanced experiences, while negative factors like climate change and environmental impact, in line with NASA (2023) and the US EPA (2022), can diminish the overall visitor experience.

The Gurara waterfalls present untapped potentials for cultural tourism deeply embedded in the Gbagyi culture. The unique identity of the Gbagyi/Gbari group influenced by their Knunu language, attitudes, behaviours, and self-perception, forms a distinctive cultural backdrop for the site (Ayuba, 2016a; Idris & Umar, 2017). The Gurara waterfalls, discovered by a Gbagyi hunter in 1745, holds historical and cultural significance for the Gbagyi people, with its nomenclature linked to the gods Gura and Rara (Hassan, 2018). However, the study reveals prevalent issues such as insufficient infrastructure,

safety concerns, and hydrophobia, which, if addressed, could significantly enhance the overall visitor experience.

Exciting features like restaurants, drinks and refreshments, outdoor park facilities, and indoor games, identified by the majority of respondents, underscore the potential for enhancing the site's appeal. These amenities provide opportunities for relaxation, entertainment, and social interaction, contributing positively to visitor experiences. The emotional responses of attraction and skepticism regarding a sleepover at Gurara Waterfall further highlight the importance of managing visitor expectations and ensuring the site meets diverse preferences.

From a cultural tourism perspective, the Gurara waterfalls could offer economic growth and cultural sustenance for the Gbagyi people. The positive correlation between the hospitality industry and the Nigerian economy, as noted by Sanni (2009), underscores the significance of cultural tourism in contributing to economic stability and growth. The findings align with existing literature on visitor experiences at tourist sites, emphasizing the importance of factors such as sustainability, proper management, and the role of destination attributes in shaping the success of the tourist site. Overall, Gurara Waterfalls can play a pivotal role in promoting cultural tourism, fostering economic development, and preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Gbagyi people.

Limitations

This study had some limitations in evaluating stakeholder feedback on Gurara Waterfalls and its cultural connection. Due to the inability to meet desired target of respondents on the field with the questionnaires, the virtual survey was used to supplement data collection. This may introduce sampling bias, as the sample may not be representative of all potential stakeholders. The study primarily focused on the Minna to Abuja environs, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The quantitative approach used in the study may not fully capture the complex nature of cultural connections and stakeholder feedback. Additionally, this research did not include explicit detail on the involvement of various stakeholders in the research process as the emphasis was on the Gurara Waterfalls as a tourist site and its cultural connection in attracting tourists.

Recommendations

Recommendations for improvements include addressing infrastructure and safety concerns, offering a variety of amenities, and engaging visitors with informative and entertaining experiences. It is recommended that further research for creative and innovative structures and the potential solutions to cultural tourism challenges in Nigeria.

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