

Motivations of American volunteer tourists to Ghana

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Abstract

With the growth in volunteer tourism, the importance of understanding the factors that drive volunteers cannot be overemphasized. Despite the rise in volunteer motivation studies, most researches have adopted a qualitative approach in the study of volunteer tourism. This study elucidates the motivation of American volunteer tourists to Ghana. America continues to be a key tourist generating region to Ghana. A thorough understanding of volunteer motivation is relevant for tourism stakeholders in their quest to make Ghana a preferred destination. To help unravel the key motivational factors, the Pull and Push theory was adopted. Sampling the views of 156 American volunteer tourists through the use of questionnaires, it is established that two prime factors, altruism and learning, and relationship motives drive American volunteers' to volunteer in Ghana.

Keywords: motivation, volunteering, pull and push, Ghana, America

Introduction

Volunteer tourism has increasingly become a rapid growing off-shoot of alternative tourism in recent times. Shrinkage of financial support after the 1970s compelled many governments and non-governmental organizations to look for volunteers who could contribute both financially and physically to field research or reconstruction work (Ellis, 2003). In recent times, developing countries have been the recipients of international volunteer tourists from the developed north. According to America's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002), more than one in four Americans engage in volunteer activities. Ghana remains one of the few countries in Africa that continues to benefit from this market niche (Tomazos & Butler, 2009). Records from Ghana's tourism ministry indicates that over the years, the United States of America has been a key tourist generating region to Ghana (2005= 50.5; 2006= 62.8; 2007= 76.9; 2008= 86.8/ figures in thousands). Consequently, developing countries

including Ghana have been net beneficiaries of volunteer tourism.

The essence of motivation in transforming potential tourists into actual tourists has received, to say the least, proliferating academic interest. Despite this, empirical research on motivations of volunteer tourists has yielded few existing results. Chen and Chen (2011) and Kozak (2001) therefore call for empirical examination of volunteer tourists' motivations so as to identify the attributes of the destination that are to be promoted and matched to the features and resources of that destination. An empirical approach is critical particularly since motivations differ between individuals and from one decision-making context to another (Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Witt & Wright, 1992).

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to examine the motivations of American volunteer tourists in Ghana. Secondly, to explore the motivations of American

volunteer tourists across selected background characteristics.

Purpose of the study

Volunteer tourism is one of the few forms of tourism that mutually benefits both the tourist and host (Lo & Lee, 2011) making it ideal for developing countries like Ghana. As an emerging market segment in the tourism sector of the country, it became necessary to ascertain the characteristics, purposes and general trend of volunteer tourism as pertaining to Ghana. As put by Kotler and Andreasen (2000) recruiting volunteers requires getting to know the target audiences through segmentation, prospect, motivational or image studies.

The study makes important contribution to knowledge exploring American volunteer tourists' motivations. Volunteer tourists in the country generally tend to stay longer than the average tourist (Boakye, 2010) and are, therefore, exposed to perhaps a sharper cultural contrast than exist in their home regions. This is particularly the situation when these volunteers leave the comfort of their cities and engage in supportive works in rural and 'less comfortable' areas of the country. Volunteer tourists have different motivations owing to their different backgrounds and aspirations. It is only in identifying volunteers' characteristics and exploring their motivations for choosing from a plethora of destinations that satisfaction, longer stay and repeat visit can be guaranteed. This knowledge is crucial to the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Studies on volunteer tourists motivations

Motivations are the essential reasons for a particular travelling behaviour and play a vital role in understanding the decision making process of tourists as well as assessing the subsequent satisfaction of tourist's expectation (Snepenger, King,

Marshall, & Uysal, 2006). To Dann (1981, p. 205), tourist motivation is a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such as decision. Earlier studies in tourism have attempted classifications of tourists based on motivations. Cohen (1972) classifies organized mass tourist and individual mass tourist, explorer and drifter. Brown and Morrison (2003) identify volunteer tourists more with novelty (drifters) than familiarity. Alternatively, volunteer tourists are more close to the explorer in Cohen's classification when considered sociologically. From a social-psychological perspective, Iso-Ahola (1983) proposes that people may tend to travel as an escape after encountering personal troubles or failures, while the gained travel experience in turn could improve intra and interpersonal esteem and social status. Kozak (2002) however cautions that it is an oversimplification to assume that tourist motivations are homogeneous.

Cheung, Michel and Miller (2010) opined that there is a constant debate in the academic literature on what motivates people to volunteer their services abroad. To Brown and Lehto (2005) making a difference, cultural immersion, seeking camaraderie and having an educational experience were four principal motivators for volunteering abroad. Alternatively, Wearing (2001) mentions altruism, travel and adventure, personal growth, cultural exchange and learning, professional development, organization goal or mission, and right time or place as volunteer tourists' motivation. Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) on the other hand found that the top motivators for volunteering in South Africa were adventure and the thrill of visiting. Coghlan (2006) also identified the desire to help the less fortunate, a contradiction to Sin's (2009) suggestion that the main motivation for going on a volunteer vacation is for personal gain. Mustonen (2007) also

claims that altruism, egoism, socializing, and individuality are four interactive dimensions that motivate volunteer tourists. Caldwell and Andereck (1994) identify intellectual pursuit as a top incentive for joining a voluntary organization. The aforementioned views on volunteer tourists motivations illustrate the necessity for further deliberation on the topic.

Volunteer tourism trends and characteristics

Though most researchers acknowledge that volunteers are extremely heterogeneous (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Wilson & Pimm, 1996), there appears to be a body of literature that suggests some commonalities in characteristics of volunteers. O'Connor (2008) suggests that unlike 'ordinary' volunteers, volunteer tourists can choose where they want to go and how long they stay. Yeoman (2008) also states that people can spend months travelling through Africa or opt for just three weeks in one particular country. Regarding their duration, Novelli (2005) indicates that volunteer projects can range from one week to over a year in length. Some argue that volunteer tourists who choose projects of over a year in length have a true altruistic motive versus volunteer tourists who choose a shorter time frame (Novelli, 2005). A reason given by Lyons (2003) is that these segments of volunteer tourists are the ones who argue that they are not tourists but volunteers.

Roker (1994) identifies that since the 1960s, there has been a shift from the erstwhile philanthropic principles of volunteering in favour of a more liberal and youth-centred understanding of volunteering. With respect to age of participants, most researches into volunteer motivations including that of Cheung, Michel and Miller (2010), Barron and Knoll (2009), Holmes and Smith, (2009), and Brown and Morrison (2003) indicate volunteers are often students between the ages of 20 to 29. Wearing and Grabowski (2011) equally concur that the

act of volunteering in developing countries is attractive to a predominantly young Western travellers. Volunteering activity is also more common in females than males (Cheung, Michel, & Miller, 2010; Tourism Research and Marketing [TRAM], 2008). It might be argued that such a trend is not be unique to volunteer tourism as studies (e.g. Andreu, Kozac, Avci, & Cifter, 2005; Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) also found that overall, females had stronger motivations to travel than males.

Influence of demographic variables on motivations

Several studies have attempted to examine the relationship between travel motivation and various socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, and income. For example, Gitelson and Kerstetter (1990) observed that females had a higher rating for relaxation, socializing and exploration than males while age was negatively related to the importance of relaxation, excitement, socializing and exploration. Likewise, Andreu, Kozac, Avci, & Cifter (2005) found that age of a tourist had no significant influence on travel motivations. Zimmer, Brayley and Searle (1995) found that alongside age, income and education were important predictors of the desire to travel. Sangpikul (2008) also noted that educational level was positive indicator of travel intentions. For those with higher educational background, relaxation, seeking knowledge and novelty were more important push motives.

Theoretical framework

Crompton's (1979) push-pull model has been a most cited motivation theory by many researchers. In the perspective of tourism, the push-pull model is the breakdown of a tourist's choice of destination into two forces. Push motives have been regarded useful for explaining the desire to go on a vacation while pull

motives have been useful in explaining the choice of destination. Goossens (2000) argues that tourists are pushed away from home by emotional needs and pulled towards a destination because of the emotional benefits the destination offers.

According to Crompton (1979), the push factors for a vacation are socio-psychological motives. The pull factors are motives aroused by the destination rather than emerging exclusively from within the traveller himself. Wearing (2001) mentions that push factors are the internal and psychological forces, which leads an individual to seek a volunteer tourism experience.

For the purpose of this study, the push motives are education, type of occupation, relationship, desire for escape and travel experience. These forces are collectively the determinants of travel. These motives reflected the influence of the destination in stirring or volunteer tourists' desire to undertake the travel. Kozak (2001) acknowledges the usefulness of this concept to model the intangible, intrinsic desires of a tourist to go on vacation.

The second force is of the "pull" type, a region-specific lure that pulls a tourist towards a destination. This aspect comprises tangible characteristics or attributes of a destination that are primarily related to the perceived attractiveness of a destination. From Crompton (1979), these pull factors are motives influenced by the destination rather than emerging exclusively from within the traveller himself. For the purpose of this study, the pull forces include volunteer opportunity (right time and place) and general attributes of the destination notably culture, heritage and nature.

METHODOLOGY

Overall, 156 American volunteer tourists were randomly selected for the study. Owing to the absence of a formally

compiled list of volunteer organisations operating in Ghana, snowball sampling technique was used to identify volunteer organisations that had American volunteer tourists as their clients (e.g. Peace Corps, Projects Abroad, American Jews Volunteer Services). As a form of crosschecking with the organisations, the coordinators of the volunteer projects were requested to provide a list of their American clients to ensure that only volunteers from America were included in the study. This list was used as the sample frame from which a random selection of individual respondents was done.

Self-completion questionnaire was used in gathering information from the respondents. The instrument consisted of three modules relating to the trip characteristics, motivation and the socio-demographic characteristics of respondent. The first module focused on volunteers' trip characteristics. The second module focused on motivations of volunteer tourists. This was done using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agreed, 2 = agreed, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagreed, 5 = strongly disagreed). The motivation elements were selected based on earlier studies in the volunteer tourism literature (e.g. Lee, 2011). Socio-demographic and background characteristics constituted the third module.

T-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used in assessing the influence of background characteristics on motivational variables. T-test statistical analysis was employed on background variables that were measured along a dichotomous scale. These included gender (1 = male, 2 = female) and marital status (1 = single, 2 = married). Other background variables such as age, education, religion, and continent were measured along interval scale differences using ANOVA.

STUDY RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics

A detailed description of the profile of volunteers was crucial for interpretation and understanding of the motives for volunteering in Ghana. Two thirds of the respondents involved in the study were females (70.5%) with most of them being single (92.3%). The age of respondents ranged from 14 to 55 with the average being 22.7 years. Volunteers between the ages of 20 to 29 dominated the age category with a total of 88 (56.4%) of the respondents. This was followed by volunteers below the age of 20 (35.3%). About 8% of the volunteer tourists were above 29 years. Approximately 58% of the respondents were educated to the tertiary level while 25% had post-

graduate level education. There were also volunteers who had secondary level education (15%). Only few volunteers mentioned that they had basic education (7%). About 92% of the respondents were first time visitors to the country.

Pull motivations of American volunteer tourists

A number of factors interplay to ‘pull’ volunteers to a destination. To Kim, Lee and Klenosky (2003), these factors could be described as the pull or attraction elements of the destination. Table 1 presents the pull forces of volunteering in Ghana.

Table 1: Pull motivations

Pull factor	Frequency	Percent (%)
Culture	104	36.9
People	84	29.8
Volunteer opportunity	30	10.6
Political climate	25	8.9
Climate	24	8.5
Attractions	15	5.3
Total	*282	100.0

*Frequency exceeds 156 because of multiple responses.

Motivations for volunteering in Ghana

In all, 26 motivational statements were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS version 16. In testing for the suitability of data for factor analysis, a number of statistical measures were employed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.90, exceeding the

recommended value of 0.60. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was also statistical significant at 0.000 with a chi-square value of 2003.26, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. In accessing the internal consistency of the data, Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was employed. Per Pallant (2005) recommendation, only factors with Cronbach’s alpha values 0.7 and above were retained.

Table 2: Push motivation of American volunteer tourists

Factors	Variables included in the factor	Factor Loading	Eigen value	% of variance Explained	Cronbach's alpha
I	Altruistic and learning				
	To broaden my horizon	0.829			
	To help others	0.809			
	Experience different cultures	0.805			
	Combine travel and help others	0.772			
	To learn new culture	0.741			
	To challenge myself	0.731			
	To learn more about the country	0.718	9.088	34.955	0.922
	To learn new skills	0.715			
	To give something back	0.712			
	For cross-cultural learning	0.694			
	For adventure	0.623			
	Develop my career	0.536			
II	Relationship needs				
	To strengthen relation with friends	0.748			
	Work with other volunteers	0.739	2.591	9.966	0.701
	To have a good time	0.666			
Total				44.921	

PCA revealed the presence of three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining of the variance. An inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the second component. Using Catell's scree test, two components were retained for further investigation. The two retained

factors cumulatively accounted for 44.9% of the total variance explaining the motivation of American volunteer tourists to Ghana. The first component accounted for 35% while the second component accounted for 10% of the motivations of American volunteer tourists.

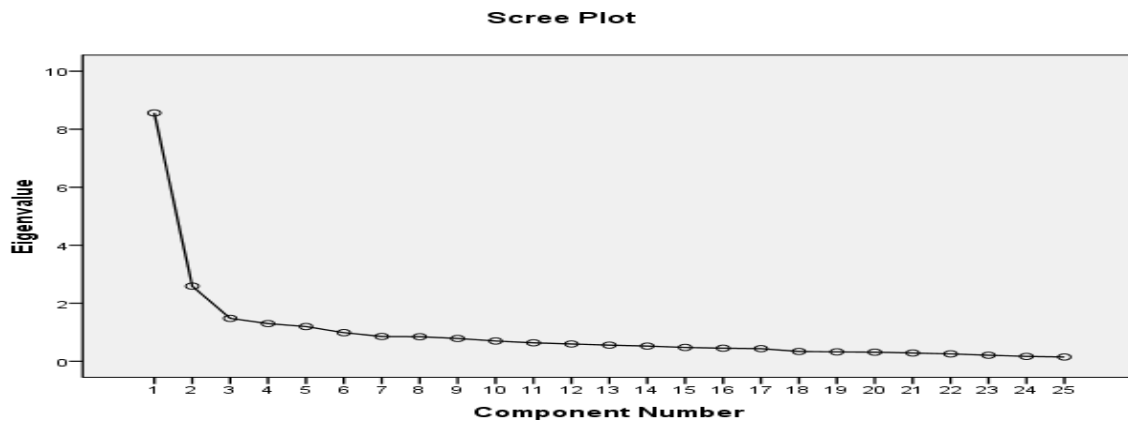


Figure 1: Scree plot

*Two factors above elbow were retained for further analysis

Table 3: push motivations by background characteristics

Background characteristics	Number	Altruistic and learning	Relationship
Gender			
Male	46	1.2156	1.4783
Female	110	1.1758	1.5000
		p=0.534	p=0.816
Age			
< 20	55	1.2818	1.4364
20-29	88	1.1392	1.5114
> 29	13	1.1154	1.6154
		p=0.055	p=0.492
Highest education			
Basic	4	1.5208	1.4167
High school	23	1.2572	1.4928
College/ university	90	1.1898	1.4593
Post graduate	39	1.1068	1.5812
		p=0.104	p=0.679
Religion			
Christian	92	1.1395	1.4674
Muslim	3	1.9444	2.3333
Atheist	26	1.2716	1.5513
Jewish	15	1.1278	1.2889
Hindu	2	1.0833	1.0000
Agnostic	18	1.2407	1.6296
		p=0.003	p=0.019
Marital status			
Unmarried	144	1.1944	1.5162
Married	12	1.1042	1.2222
		p=0.410	p=0.064
School status			
Non-student	52	1.1619	1.4231
Student	104	1.2003	1.5288
		p=0.535	p=0.241
Length of stay			
less than 2 weeks	7	1.4643	1.6190
2- 4 weeks	59	1.2020	1.4237
5- 8 weeks	60	1.1472	1.4722
9- 12 weeks	20	1.1000	1.7167
3- 6 months	8	1.3125	1.3750
7- 12 months	2	1.3750	2.0000
		p=0.183	p=0.199

* Frequency exceeds 156 because of multiple responses.

Items coded on scale 1-1.49= Agree, 1.50- 2.49= Neutral, 2.50- 3= Disagree.

Discussion

This paper examined the characteristics and motivations of American volunteer tourists to Ghana. Females (71%), students (66.7%), and unmarried volunteers (92%) were overwhelmingly the dominant

subgroups identified in the study. Studies conducted in the volunteer tourism field tend to amplify this assertion (Cheung, Michel & Miller, 2010; Bang & Ross, 2009). The age group 20-29 constituted more than half of the respondents (56.4%). The age of respondents parallels other studies which

have reported similar age differences with the majority of their respondents falling within the age groups of 18 to 30 years (Cheung, Michel, & Miller, 2010; Holmes & Smith, 2009; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Brown & Morrison, 2003).

Although the educational levels of volunteer tourists vary, literature asserts that most volunteer tourists have a college education (Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Ari, Mansfeld & Mittelberg, 2003; McGehee, 2002). Respondents involved in this survey were college or university leavers (58%) who use the volunteer placement to other countries to enrich their experiences. They learn transferable skills that will enhance employability (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998). Others regard the placement as an opportunity to learn new cultures and develop new practical skills during and after their university education.

Pull and push motives interact in a dynamic and evolving context (Correia, 2000) to influence the volunteer tourist's decision to travel (McCabe, 2000). Respondents identified six key pull elements that motivated them to choose their volunteer destination. Culture (37%) was found to have the strongest influence on the decision to choose Ghana as a volunteer destination. This was followed by the hospitality of Ghanaians (30%), opportunity to volunteer in Ghana (11%), climatic conditions (9%). Climate and attractions were the least pull forces drawing volunteer tourists to the country.

Due to the international nature of volunteer tourism exposures, the desire of volunteers is often fuelled by the yearning to get to know other cultures. The results of this study, therefore, buttress the fact that culture has potential link to volunteer tourism (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). Robinson, Heitmann and Dieke (2011) have also stressed the

importance of culture in influencing tourism demand.

The study also investigated differences in the motivational factors for selected socio-demographic and travel groups. Two broad factors accounted for volunteers' decision to volunteer in Ghana. Altruistic and learning had greater variance explaining the motivations for volunteering in the country (35%). The second factor which was retained for further investigation accounted for about 10% of the motivations of American volunteer tourists to Ghana. Wickham and Graefe (1998) identified that in addition to altruistic and egoistic motives, there are those volunteers who desire a social setting to interact with others.

With exception of religion, significant differences were not observed in the motivations of volunteers across sex, education, marital status, occupation, length of stay and the type of volunteer activity engaged in. Significant differences were observed in the altruistic and learning ($p=0.00$) and relationship ($p=0.02$) motives of the sampled volunteer tourists with respect to their religious affiliation. While the other religious sects appeared to have had stronger altruistic and learning as well as relationship motives for volunteering in Ghana, Muslim volunteers were impartial on these motives (mean=1.94; mean=2.33 respectively). The other religious denominations were, however, in agreement that they were motivated by the desire to help alleviate the plight of others while embarking on learning. Christians, for example, (mean=1.14) were assertive that altruism and learning was a motivation for their travel. This is interesting because though Robinson, Heitmann and Dieke (2011) have established that religion can determine the demand for certain types of holidays, none of the respondents engaged in any religious or mission work.

Though the other variables (sex, age, education, marital status, occupational status, length of stay and type of volunteer

activity) did not record significant differences in motivations, a keen observation reveals some trends. For example, both male and female respondents were affirmative that they were more strongly motivated by altruistic and learning interests while they were both neutral to relationship motives. Similarly, both married (mean=1.10) and unmarried (mean=1.19) volunteers had strong altruistic and learning motives though they slightly differed in terms of relationship motives (mean=1.22; mean=1.52 respectively).

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to examine the dimensions of American volunteer tourists' motivations for visiting Ghana. explore whether volunteer tourists' characteristics differed across their motivations for volunteering. A prominent feature of this study was the dominance of young, single females who are mainly students of tertiary institutions in the United States of America. Though they were mainly first timers drawn by the cultural and hospitable attributes of the country, they were not novices to volunteering.

Two prime factors interplay to influence volunteer tourists' decision to travel to Ghana. While literature has repeatedly stated altruistic and egoistic motives for volunteering, altruism does not stand alone in motivating volunteers. Altruism and learning go hand-in-hand alongside relationship driven motives to influence volunteers' decision to visit. It is therefore prudent for volunteer managers and organisations to highlight programmes that foster the learning potential of volunteer tourists.

While the concept of motivations has been researched, there are still dark spots about the role of other forces in influencing these motivations. One of such concerns is the motivations of service providers like

homestay operators, volunteer organisations and institutions for engaging in volunteer tourism. A recurring question in this regard is "what are the perceived and actual benefits to not only the visitors but also the visited?"

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