Socio-demographic Characteristics and Customers' Visitation Pattern to Selected Ecolodges in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Social demographic characteristics are critical factors that bolster visitation pattern in relation to choice of destination and increase marketability in today's hospitality industry. This is a serious consideration for undertaken this study on the influence of demographic factors on visitation pattern among tourists to selected ecolodges in Cross River State Nigeria. The survey was conducted in Cross River National Park and Obudu Mountain Resorts between December 2019 and November 2020. Convenience sampling technique was adopted to administer 635 structured questionnaires at both locations. The findings revealed information on social demographic characteristics of the respondents and visitation pattern to the selected destinations. Regression result indicated that income and age are significant socio-demographic variables predicted variation in customers' visitation pattern. Designing of marketing strategies for ecolodge products/services based on the available information on social demographic factors of the visitors were canvassed for policy implementation.

Keywords: Ecolodge, visitation pattern, destinations, marketing strategies, Nigeria

Introduction

Tourism is a tool for economic recovery and prosperity, the industry has had a lot of positive impact on many countries around the world with the view of creating conducive environments for tourists to visit such destinations (Khan, Bibi, Lyu & Babar, 2020). Obviously, if properly harnessed, tourism has the capacity to spawn wealth, empower the citizenry and generate employment opportunities (Akinboade &Braihmoh, 2010; Chung & Cheng, 2011). In a bid to maximise the positive impacts of tourism and minimising the environmental impacts, the appeal of alternative forms of tourism, especially eco-tourism, has grown globally and have become more apparent in the society. Ecotourism has been a source of foreign exchange, tax revenue earner and employment generation across the world (Hapsari, 2018; Perera, Richard & Sampath, 2012).

Similarly, many ideas have evolved since the concept of ecotourism was conceived especially in the area of hospitality management. Over the past decade, customers have become more environmentally conscious (Dewald, Bruin & Jang, 2014), hence ecolodge has been considered as an environmental friendly accommodation facility with blend of nature and

culture offering needed comfort that are beneficial to the tourists. There is growing perception that if tourists are offer unique experience in the natural surroundings they would probably accept more ecological alternative (Bulatović, 2017). The author opined that developing infrastructure that supports ecotourism and other forms of tourism based on nature, including ecolodge accommodation with proper sport activity and rest contents will enhance tourism potential in protected areas. This strengthening the assertion that ecolodge as a form of ecotourism accommodation provides unique experience in the natural surroundings and it is a force that must be reckoned with in the future tourism development of a country (Kiper, 2013). There is therefore a need for National Park management authority to embrace the idea of constructing high quality ecolodge with specific facilities for that location and fully blended into nature and in accordance with highest international standards for quality and improved environment (Bulatovic, 2017). This is in tandem with the attributes of ecolodge as insinuated by the leading ecotourism society in the World as an environmental friendly accommodation facility with blend of nature and culture offering needed comfort that are beneficial to the tourists (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015).

The intricate link between ecolodges and ecotourism is better explains based on the similarities in their underlined principles. While ecotourism support visit to nature based environment, creates a value for local knowledge, promote conservation education and generate income (Oladeji, 2015), similarly, ecolodge is a form of accommodation that promote environmental friendliness and sensitivity (Sumanapala, 2016). Ecolodge and ecotourism or nature based tourism are being used interchangeably in this study as a result of the shared similarities in their ethics. While ecolodge has gained more global recognition, especially in the nature-based tourism sector (Kwan, Eagles, Paul & Gebhardt, 2010), there has been little study of its significance in the emerging competitive ecotourism market (Chan & Baum 2007; Sumanapala, Kotagama, Perera & Suranga, 2017) largely due to the fact that people failed to realise that ecolodge is not only about providing accommodation service in an environmental friendly manner, but it also generates new market and employment opportunities (Heiyantuduge & Ambalam, 2015).

Literature review

The World has witnessed various forms of environmental catastrophes in the recent time that calls for serious concern. Han and Yoo (2015); Norazah and Norbayah (2015) emphasised that global warming is one of the environmental problems that is continually confronting the globe. There is therefore an urgent need for a shift in paradigm for the world to achieve a sustainable lifestyle. This supports the views of Gladwin, Kennelly and Krause, (1995) on the need for a shift in paradigms in management theory and research to achieve Sustainable Development. This explains the reasons why hotels have adopted ecologically friendly designs and operations in environmental practices, such as lowering pollutant emission, procuring green goods, and conserving water and energy (Barber, 2014; Han, Hsu, Lee & Sheu, 2011).

Environmentally sustainable goods and services offered by eco-lodge have a greater chance of attracting a large number of happy and loyal customers (Moise, Gil-Saura & Molina, 2021). It was for this reason that ecolodge is becoming a favourite destination for those who practice eco- tourism and it is also on the list of the most sought after among those who want high adventure, simplicity, and being in harmony with nature (Sumanapala, 2016). Customers are conscious of the importance of an environmentally friendly atmosphere; consequently, many now want to stay in an environmentally-friendly destination when they travel (Perera et al., 2012). Whether it's for pleasure, business, or other purposes, there are a growing number of eco-lodges that have added eco-friendly living features (KoIk &Pinkse, 2005; Orsato, 2006). Ecolodges, unlike other types of tourist accommodation, provide an educational and

participatory experience for tourists/customers with focus on environmental standards and long-term sustainable development (Andrews, Baum & Morrison, 2001) as well as provide a high-contact service environment.There is therefore a need for proper examination of the destination's hospitality facilities, goods and services to assess how suitable they are, with the intention to improve the quality of accommodation offered to their customers , as well as other products and services that lead to increased customer circulation, patronage and spending (Bakic, 2002). This will invariable lead to increase market base and foster the growth of tourism sector as a whole especially in this critical economic dispensation.

This forms part of the view of Falade Obalade, and Dubey (2014) that in the face of growing level of competition in the worldwide tourism industry among nations, the aptitude to withstand competition depend on the ability of each hosting nation to offer a combination of a better travel quality experience at affordable prices to ensure satisfaction of their customers. In their analysis of visitor motivation factors Tkaczynski and Toh (2014) identified people, escape, culture and enjoyment as key elements that must be given serious consideration. Getz and Page (2015) opined that as tourism manager, creating and marketing tourist attractions entail a marketing point of reference and commitment to customers' service, thus there is need for destination managers to be positioned and branded in such a way as to be attractive both to those seeking broad benefits such as entertainment, socializing and leisure activity. Research findings from studies in travel motivations has assisted tourism marketers in product development , improving service quality , image development, and promotional activities which have invariably help in understanding consumer decision process and tourist behavior (Caber & Albayrak, 2016). In view of the changes occurring in the tourism industry, there was a noted dynamism in the social demographic characteristics of tourists as related to travel motivation (Anson et al., 2018). Ezebilo (2014) have earlier reported that ecotourists (i.e. visitors to ecotourism sites) often have varied demographic characteristics, personal backgrounds, preferences and motivations.

Consequently, active and proper management is needed in nature-based areas such as nature reserves (e.g Obudu Mountain Resort) and national parks (e.g Cross River National Park) to cater for the accommodation and the needs of increasing number of tourists without excessively damaging the environment (Eagles, McCool, Haynes & Phillips, 2002). This can only be achieved through in-depth understanding of tourist's socio demographic dynamics and changing visitation characteristics pattern, motivating factors and satisfaction to facilitate development of inclusive marketing strategy (Lee, 2009; Lee & Abrahams, 2018). Adam, Atanga and Francis (2019) opined that socio demographic characteristics are indicators of tourist motivation.. Likewise, both the socio demographic characteristics and motivation of tourists could predict their level of satisfaction and future travel behaviour (Kim, Park, & Guo, 2008; Ozdemir, Aksu, Ehtiyar, Çizel, Çizel & Içigen, 2012). While investments in key infrastructure sectors such as energy, water, telecommunications and transport are important for maximising Africa's tourism potential (Africa Development Bank, 2013), it is equally essential to focus on the consumer needs , satisfactions and understanding of his/her travel motivations. Invariably, some of the supply side interventions are likely to yield better effects if they are guided or informed by the needs and expectations of the tourists.

Nigeria is presently a monolithic economy (Owan, Ndibe & Anyanwu, 2020) and oil provides a huge chunk of her revenue base accounting for about 95% of its export's earnings. In view of the dwindling oil price the economy is beginning to experiencing cyclical fluctuations, which bears negatively on government spending, resulting in fiscal deficits and these conditions have different impacts on the magnitude of the subsequent debt service payments (Omoruyi, 2005). Nigerian States and Federal Debt Stock data as of 31st March 2021 reflected that the country's total public debt portfolio stood at N33.11trn while N12.47trn or

37.67% of the debt was external, 20.64trn or 62.33% of the debt was domestic (NBS, 2021).This scenario is not augur well for the country regarded as the giant Africa.

To address the anomaly in international trade and safe the country from burrowing and other form of financial predicament, Adeyemo and Oladeji, (2013) has earlier suggested that it is very important for the government of Nigeria to invest and diversify the economy. To this end, development of tourism industry especially hospitality sector is considered as alternative foreign exchange earner simply because this would reduce over-dependence on the oil sector, and ensure a relatively more stable economy, which would be less sensitive to the wider fluctuations associated with economies with one dominant oil industry. Diversifying the economy through investment in tourism industry to boost the foreign exchange earning of developing nation like Nigeria is discerning as advocated through the medium of increasing the revenue and foreign direct investment inflow in developing countries like Jordan (Falade, Obalade & Dubey, 2014) and some other West African countries (Adeyemo & Oladeji, 2013).

This can be achievable in Nigeria context considered the abundance natural resources, such as vast tracts of natural areas, species diversity zones, majestic waterfalls, mountain peaks, a diversity and richness of wildlife, and diverse natural landscape, coastlines, and geographical features, holiday resorts, eco-tourism assets, heritage/culture, adventure/safari, and sports that the country is endowed (Omitola, 2017). Harnessing the inherent potentials will boost her balance of payment position through inflows from foreign exchange. Cross River, in particular, is a state with limitless tourist potential, ranking among Nigeria's most popular tourist states and rich in eco-tourism destinations (Agbor, 2018). In addition, notable events and other tourism related activities that are capable of convincing tourists to take a trip can be found there. Not surprisingly the State is nicknamed people's paradise on the list of thirty six (36) Sates in Nigeria.

Nature-based tourists' demographic characteristics, motivation and satisfaction have been studied fairly widely across the World especially in the Western nations but research in Nigeria has been sparse given the country's large population and extensive natural landscape as reported in literature (Wambani Ogunjinmi & Oladeji, 2020). Although, Huang, Luo, Ding and Scott (2014) reported that the construct of travel motivations is widely researched and has been studied in different settings. However, Kim and Prideaux (2005), Rittichainuwat, Qu and Mongkhonvanit,(2008) observed that most of these empirical studies are focus on North American and European countries. Various reasons have been adjudged for sparse studies in nature-based tourists' demographic characteristics, motivation and satisfaction in some countries in Asia and Africa as reported in literature (KFH, 2009; Africa Development Bank, 2015).

In the quest to harness the diverse opportunities derivable from ecotourism resources and diversify her economy, there is need for the tourist destination managers in Nigeria to periodically assess the perceptions of their visitors based on the information obtained on the socio demographic characteristics, personal backgrounds, preferences and motivating factors for them to be able to catch up with the market dynamism. This forms the basis for undertaking this study with the intention to assess the socio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern to Obudu Mountain Resorts and Cross River National Park in Cross River. The information obtained will go a long way towards developing a blue print and developmental roadmap for marketing plan and strategy in meeting the needs and expectations of the customers in ObuduCattle ranch resort and Cross river National Park.

Methodology

Obudu Mountain resort is close to the Cameroon border in the North eastern part of Cross River State in Nigeria, approximately 110km east of Ogoja and 65km from the town of Obudu. It Falls within the Obaniliku Local Government Area. Situated on a relatively flat plateau on the

Oshierigde of the Sankwala Mountains, Obudu Mountain Resorts is approximately 134 square Kilometres in extent. It is located between latitudes $6^0 21^1 30^{11}$ N and $6^0 22^1 30^{11}$ N and longitude $9^0 22^1 0^{11}$ E and $9^0 22^1 45^{11}$ E and 90 221 4511 E, and has an approximate area of 104sqm^2 and It is at the elevator of around 5200 feet (1,576 metres) above sea level, and enjoys a cool temperate climate resulting in a landscape of rolling grassland and Montana forest. It is an area of idyllic tranquillity, beautiful scenery and breathtaking views (Obudu Mountain Resort front Desk; Cross River State Tourism Bureau 2010).

The Cross River National Park is a national park of Nigeria, situated in Cross River State, Nigeria. There are two separate sections, Okwangwo (founded 1991) and Oban (founded 1988). The park has a total landscape of almost 4,000 km^2, most of which comprises of primary humid tropical rainforests in the North and Central parts, with mangrove swamps in the riverine zones. A section of the park belongs to the Guinea-Congolian region, with a closed canopy and scattered growing trees spreading to 40 or 50 meters in height". (Cross River National Park, 2010). The Oban Hills Division is 2,800 km^2 in size and is located at 5°25′0″N 8°35′0″E/ 5.41667°N 8.58333°E.The division shares a lengthy borderland with Korup National Park in the Republic of Cameroon, forming a sole protected ecological zone. While the Okwangwo division is stationed at coordinates 6°17′00″N 9°14′00″E/ 6.28333°N 9.23333°E. It is inclusive of the former Boshi, Okwangwo and Boshi Extension Forest Reserves. (Ogunjobi; et al., 2010). The division has a landscape of almost 920 km^2 at an altitude of 150-1,700m above sea level. It is separated from the Oban division to the south by almost 50 km of disturbed rainforest. It is south-west of the Obudu Plateau and close to the east of the Afi River Forest Reserve, separated from this reserve by the Mbe Mountains Community forest. (Cross River National Park, 2010).

Figure: 1 Map of Nigeria showing the study area
 Source: Author field survey (2020)

A quantitative study was conducted by means of a structured questionnaire to collate socio-demographic data and data concerning visitation Pattern of tourists. Surveys were conducted at two ecotourism destinations in Cross River State of and included the following: Cross River National Park (N=283), and Obudu Mountain Resorts (388) from December 2019- November 2020, resulting in 671 questionnaires. Out of the six hundred and seventy-one (671) copies administered Six hundred and thirty-five (635) questionnaires representing (95%) were

retrieved while the remaining thirty six (36) questionnaires (5%) were not returned. The questionnaire used to survey visitors was identical for all the study areas and consisted of socio-demographic characteristics details and visitation pattern of tourists. Convenience sampling was used, since all overnight visitors in the park during the time of the survey formed part of the sample. Microsoft Excel was used for data capturing and basic data analysis while SPSS (Statistical packages for social sciences version 25.0), was used for the analysis of data. The statistical analysis comprised three stages. Firstly, Descriptive Analysis (Tables and Charts), were used to analyse the socio-demographic profile and visitation pattern of respondents. Secondly, and a Multivariate (Regression) analysis was conducted to analyse the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics and customer's visitation pattern to Obudu Mountain Resorts and National Park in Cross River State.

Result

Socio-demographic characteristics

The average (sum of Cross River National park and Obudu Mountain resort) age distribution in Figure 1 shows that majority of the respondents (95.3%) were between ages 18 and 55years with only 4.7% of the Tourists aged above 56 years. The largest group of Tourists were (27.60%) young men and women at ages 25 to 31 years. These age bracket of 18 to 55 years are tourists that fall within the active age group.
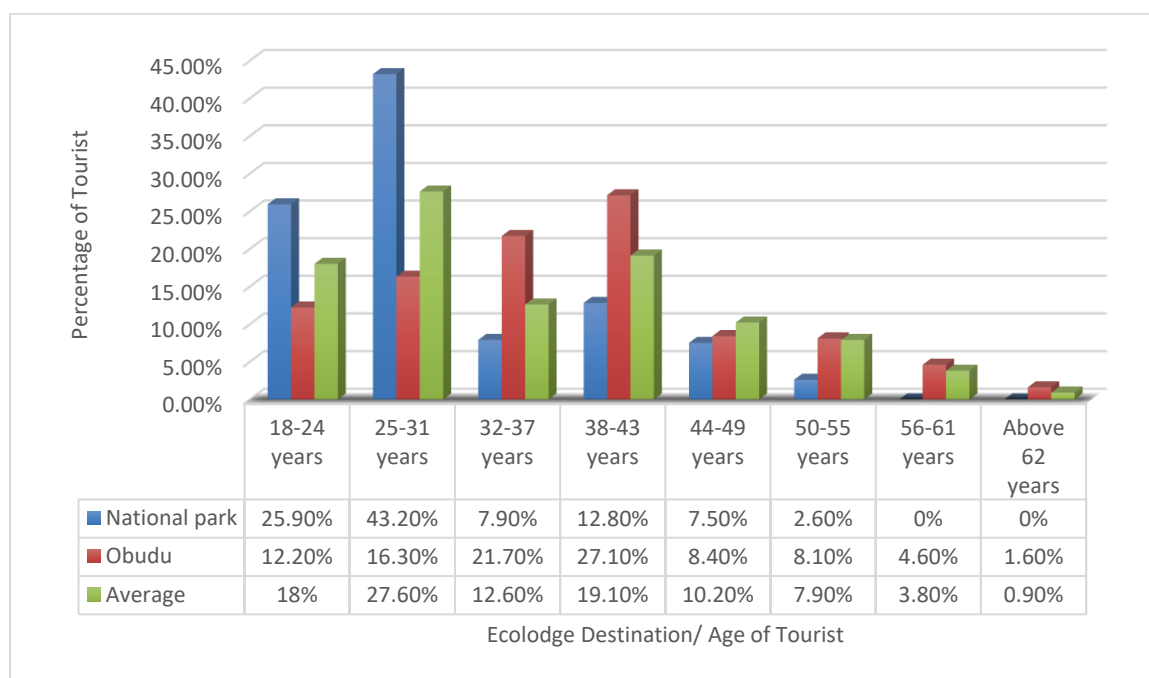

Ecolodge Destination/ Age of Tourist	18-24 years	25-31 years	32-37 years	38-43 years	44-49 years	50-55 years	56-61 years	Above 62 years
National park	25.90%	43.20%	7.90%	12.80%	7.50%	2.60%	0%	0%
Obudu	12.20%	16.30%	21.70%	27.10%	8.40%	8.10%	4.60%	1.60%
Average	18%	27.60%	12.60%	19.10%	10.20%	7.90%	3.80%	0.90%

Figure: 1 Age of tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

Figure 2 shows that 58.30% of the respondents of this study were male and 41.70% females. The close range indicates that both men and women alike patronise the ecolodge but men are more likely because of the customary practice of women being more occupied in home based activities than involvement in tourism-related activities.
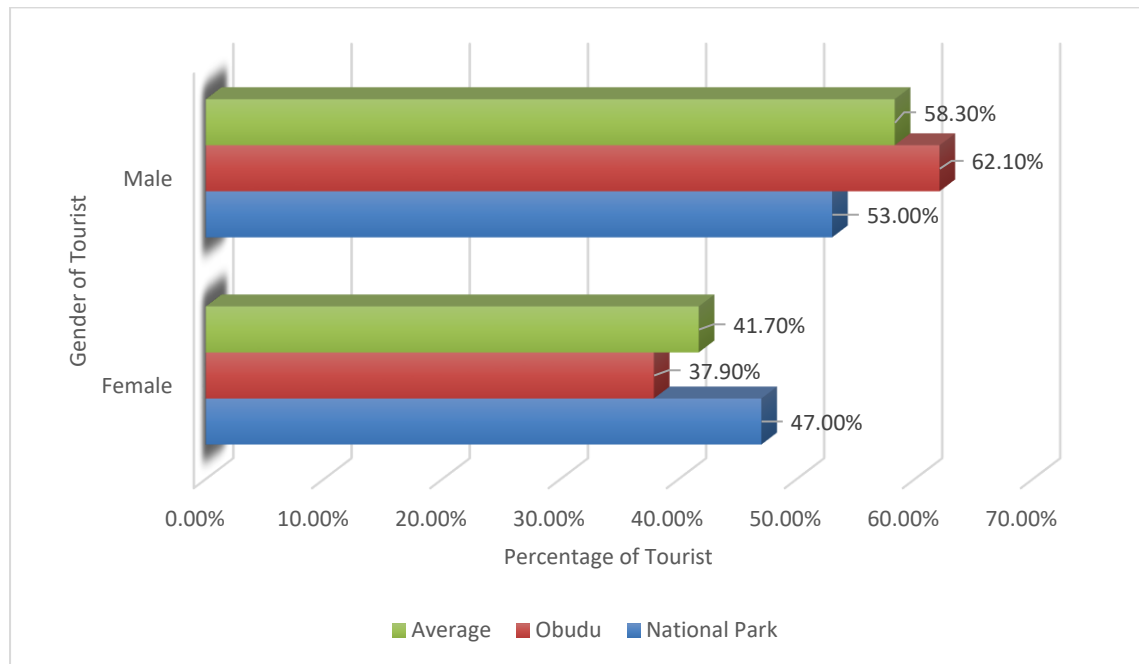
Figure 2: Gender of tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

Educational exposure of the respondents was high at 75.50 % that is, 46.90% had HND/Bachelor degree, 15.40% had Master's or higher degree and 13.20% had ND as shown in (Figure 3). Few had senior secondary level of education (11.00%), and only 8.80% had junior secondary level or less. The result shows that the tourists were people relatively with some level of educational exposure.
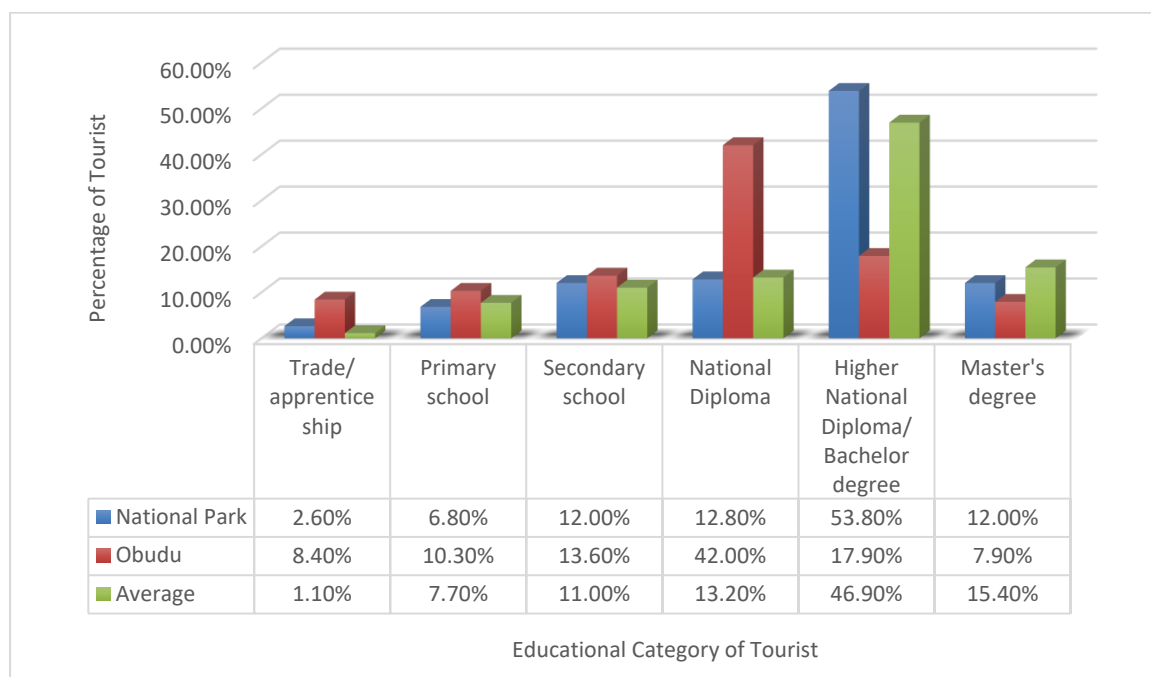

	Trade/ apprentice ship	Primary school	Secondary school	National Diploma	Higher National Diploma/ Bachelor degree	Master's degree
National Park	2.60%	6.80%	12.00%	12.80%	53.80%	12.00%
Obudu	8.40%	10.30%	13.60%	42.00%	17.90%	7.90%
Average	1.10%	7.70%	11.00%	13.20%	46.90%	15.40%

Educational Category of Tourist

Figure 3: Educational category of tourist
Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2020

Table 1 depicts the monthly income of the respondents where27.4% and 25.4% claimed to be earning N120, 001-N150, 000 ($340-$424) and > N200, 000 (above $425) per monthrespectively. In the same vein, 14.5% claimed to earn between N60, 001 and N90, 000 ($170-$254), 13.7% earned between N90, 001and N120, 000 ($255-$339), 10.4 %earned less than N30, 000 (less $84), and only 8.7% earned from N30, 001 to N60, 000 ($85-$169).

Table 1: Income (Naira/ Dollar) of tourist

S/No	Income(Naira/ Dollar) of Tourist	Ecolodge Destination					
		National Park		Obudu		Total	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	< N30,000 (less $84)	26	9.8	40	10.8	66	10.4
2.	N30,001-N60,000 ($85-$169)	6	2.3	49	13.3	55	8.7
3.	N60,001-N90,000 ($170-$254)	33	12.4	59	16.0	92	14.5
4.	N90,001-N120,000 ($255-$339)	37	13.9	50	13.6	87	13.7
5.	N120,001-N150,000 ($340-$424)	75	28.2	99	26.8	174	27.4
6.	> N200,000 (above $425)	89	33.5	72	19.5	161	25.4
	Total	**266**	**100.0**	**369**	**100.0**	**635**	**100.0**

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

A considerable percentage of the respondents were employed either as professionals (29.80%)or civil servants (29.80%) as shown in Table 2 thus, a total of 59.60% of the respondents are civil servants and professionals. These were followed by 'others' which include unemployed and retired people accounting for 20.20%, traders(11.80%),artisans(4.40%) and farmers(4.10%).

Table 2: Occupation of tourist

S/No	Occupation of Tourist	Ecolodge Destination					
		National Park		Obudu		Total	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Farmers	13	4.9	13	3.5	26	4.1
2.	Artisan	20	7.5	8	2.2	28	4.4
3.	Traders	32	12.0	43	11.7	75	11.8
4.	Civil servants	81	30.5	108	29.3	189	29.8
5.	Professionals	54	20.3	135	36.6	189	29.8
6.	Others specify	66	24.8	62	16.8	128	20.2
	Total	**266**	**100.0**	**369**	**100.0**	**635**	**100.0**

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

Visitation pattern
From the graph in Figure 4 a significant proportion (56.5%) of the respondents reveal that they visit the destination for pleasure, 16.2% for other purposes not specified, 14.8% said they travel for friendship/relatives interactions, and the remaining 12.4% embark on trip strictly for business.
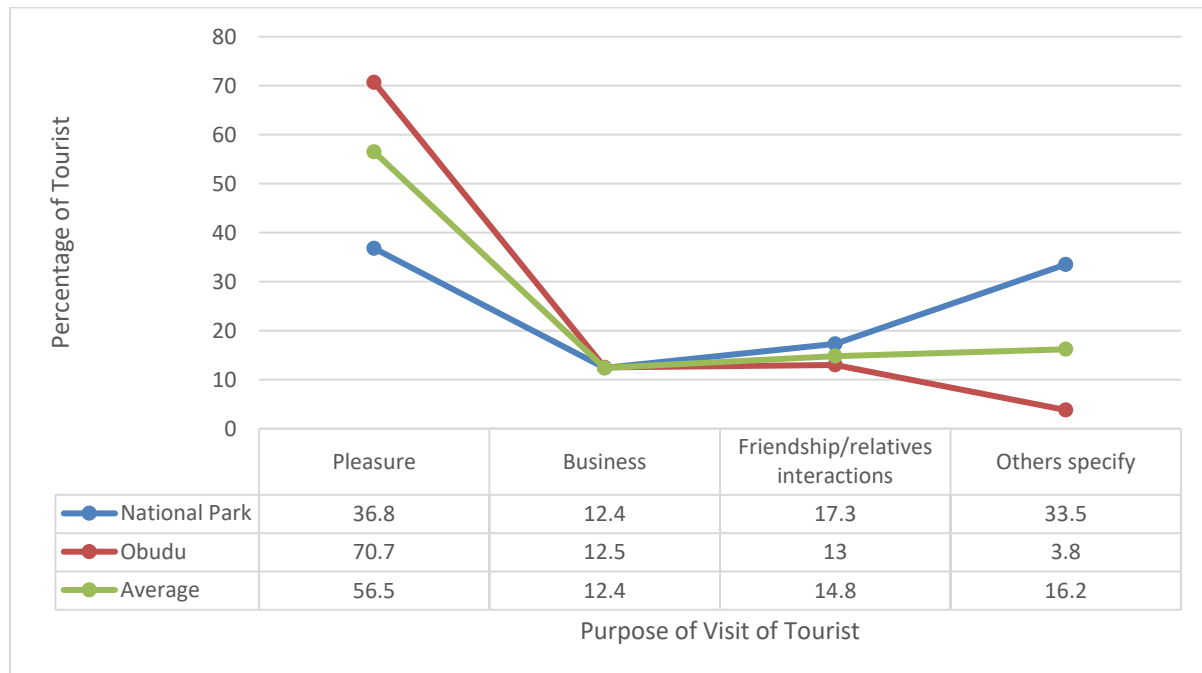
	Pleasure	Business	Friendship/relatives interactions	Others specify
National Park	36.8	12.4	17.3	33.5
Obudu	70.7	12.5	13	3.8
Average	56.5	12.4	14.8	16.2

Figure 4: Purpose of visit of tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

More than half (53.50%) of the respondents in Figure 5 showed their preference for eco-lodge because of the serene/natural environment (33.80% and 67.80%), and preference for comfort (46.60% and 22.50%). Preference for economic value was in the average of 6.10%, and preference for cleanliness had 3.90% and preference for safety and sustainable development were1.90% respectively. The result found that many of the tourist's priorities their preference of choosing eco-lodge over other destinations/accommodations.
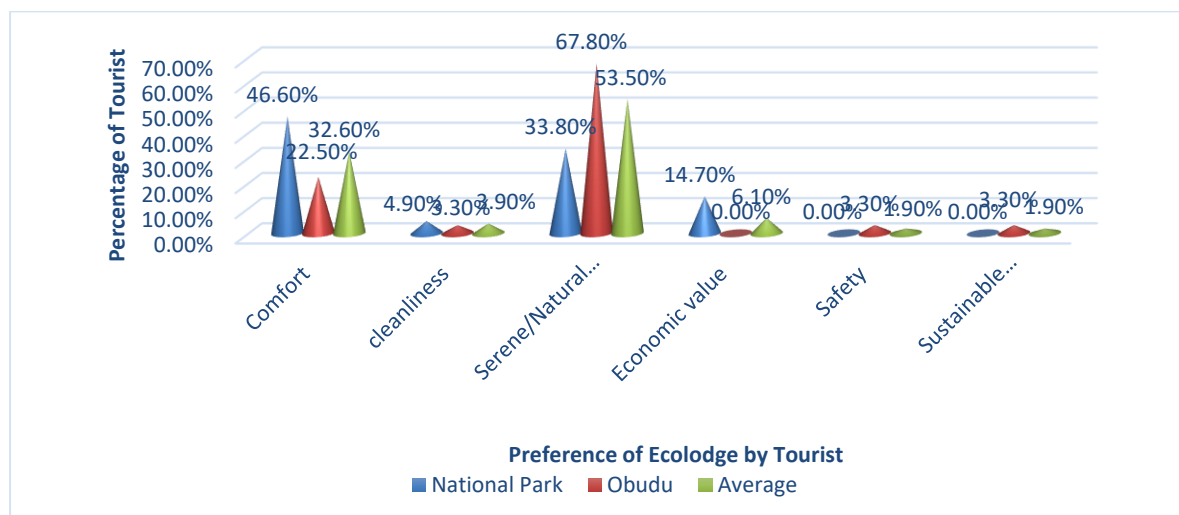

Figure 5: Preference of ecolodge by tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

The result in Figure 6 indicated that 32.60% and 27.20% visited the ecolodge for 1 to 3 times and 4 to 6 times. Likewise, 18.30% of the respondents made visit 7 to 9 times, 17.20%enthusiasts made above 13 visits to the eco-lodge, and 4.70% respondents said they had visited the ecolodge 10 to 12 times. According to the finding, greater part of the respondents are recurrent travellers to Cross River National park and Obudu Mountain resorts for more than

one time. According to the finding, greater part of the respondents are recurrent travellers to Cross River National park and Obudu Mountain resorts for more than one time.
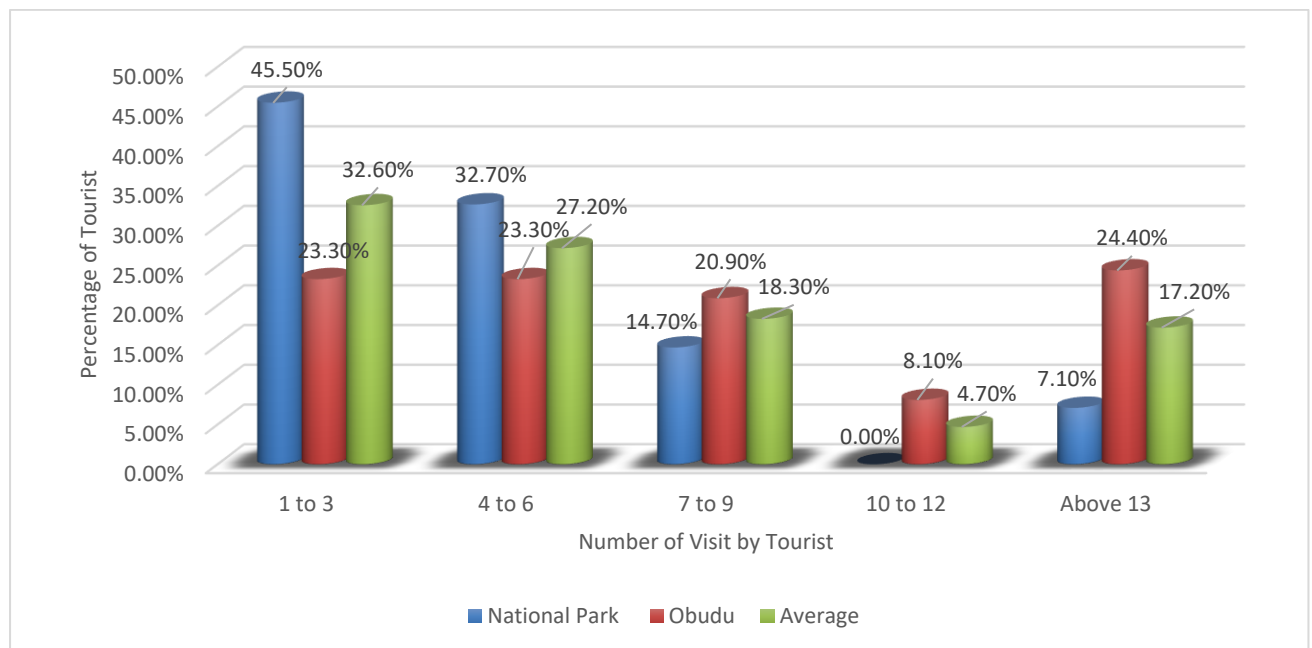

Figure 6: Number of visits to ecolodge by tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

Out of the total respondents in figure 7, significant numbers of them were dedicated eco-tourists whose fundamental aim for trip is ecotourism and spent longer vacation especially for pleasure purpose. The result suggests that 36.6% of the tourist stay for 6 to 30 days and 14.30% stay for more than 31 nights..
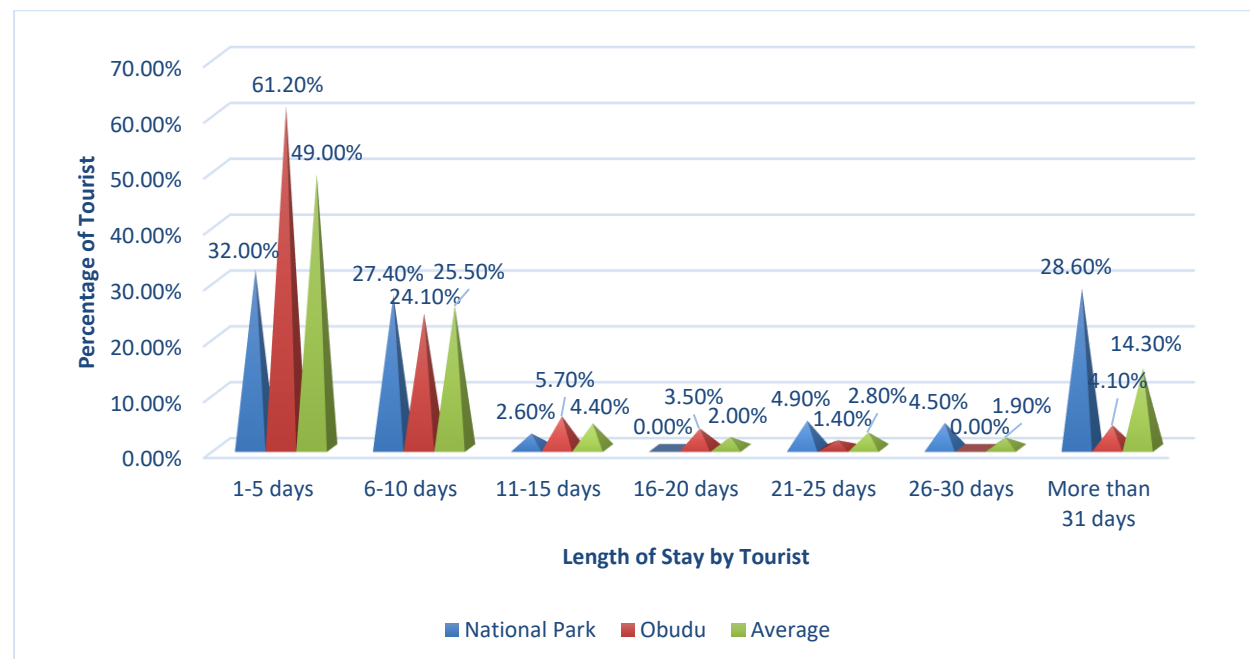

Figure 7:Length of Stay in the ecolodge by tourist
Source: Author's fieldwork, 2020

Multivariate (Regression) Analyses

Regression Analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern to Obudu Mountain Resorts and National Park in Cross River State

Results of multiple regression analysis carried out to predict the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern to Obudu Mountain Resorts and National Park in Cross River State are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The independent variables $(x_i...x_n)$ selected for the model are age, gender, and nationality. Others include religion, occupation, education, income of tourists, with customer's visitation pattern as the dependent variable (y). The general linear regression model for the analysis is shown below;

$$y = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 + b_3 x_3 + ----- b_n x_n + e \text{ --- (1)}$$

y = dependent variable (customer's visitation pattern)

a = y-intercept; that is the point at which the regression cuts across the y-axis.

b_n = the b coefficients

x_n = independent variables (Age and Income of tourists)

e = error term

Table 3: Regression Coefficients ofsocio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
(CONSTANT)	1.476	0.179		8.237	0.000
INCOMNI	0.515	0.036	0.480	14.217	0.000
AGE	-0.169	0.028	-0.205	-6.066	0.000

Dependent Variable: customers' visitation pattern (CUVISPA)

Investigating the influence of Income and Age on visitation pattern of customers, the empirical model estimates;

$$\text{CUVISPA} = 1.476 + 0.515 \text{ (INCOMNI)} - 0.169 \text{ (AGE) -------------------------------------- (2)}$$

An Unstandardised regression coefficient for income (INCOME) is 0.515 statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This implies that for an additional unit to income of respondents in the study area, a positive variation of 0.515 is predicted on customers' visitation pattern. In the same vein, -0.169 coefficient of regression calculated for Age was found to be significant statistically ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that for an additional unit to age of tourist that visits Cross River State, a negative variation of -0.169 is predicted on customers' visitation pattern. Conversely, it is unusual for age to possess a negative sign and attribute. Therefore, for every unit increase in income (0.515) and age (0.169) of tourist visiting the ecolodge, a correspondent increase in customers' visitation pattern by 51.5% and 16.9 coefficients of determination (r^2) are predicted, while other variables are held constant in the study area. Income and Age are therefore seen as major factors motivating customers' visitation pattern to the ecolodge. This shows that as income improves and age increases, visitation pattern of customers become frequent.

Table 4: ANOVA ofsocio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	558.485	2	279.243	124.872	0.000
Residual	1413.301	632	2.236		
Total	1971.786	634			

Dependent Variable: CUVISPA   Predictors: (Constant), INCOMNI, AGE

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) presented in Table 4 reveals that the predictive model was statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ with $F (2, 632) = 124.872$

Table 5: Model Summary of socio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.532	0.283	0.281	1.49540

Predictors: (Constant), INCOMNI, AGE

The summary of the model presented in Table 5 indicates that income and age as the only significant socio-economic variable included in the model were able to predict variation in customers' visitation pattern with R-Square as 0.283 (28.3%) and the adjusted R-square value as 0.281. This shows that the independent variables (INCOMNI and AGE) in the model accounted for 28.1% variation in the dependent variable (CUVISPA) statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This indicates error term of 71.9% left for other unexplained factors. That is, Income and Age alone are inadequate to instigate visitation pattern of customers to an ecolodge. Arising from the above analysis, it shows a significant relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and customers' visitation pattern to Obudu Mountain Resorts and National Park in Cross River State.

Discussion

Ma, Cho, Cheung , Lee, and Liu (2015) opined that socio demographic and visitation characteristics of tourists, such as age, education level, and income, could be good predictors of their motivation since previous studies on the association between these factors have been established. Hence, the presence of tourists within the age bracket of between 18 and 55 years as revealed from this study is an indication that this group of tourists are likely to be motivated by 'novelty' with tendencies to make trips compared to those that in the age group of above 55 years that are relatively negligible. This supports the findings of Luo and Deng, (2008) that younger Chinese tourists in this age group are motivated by novelty seeking more than the elderly. Kim et al. (2008) also emphasized that younger people are more motivated by novelty seeking than older people. Wanbami et al. (2020) also noted that highest percentage of tourists to Chad Basin National Park, Nigeria and Gashaka Gumnti National Park, Nigeria are those within the age 15-54 years. However, all these results are contrary to the findings obtained by Jang and Feng (2007), Johnsson and Devonish (2008) that older people are motivated by novelty.

Educational exposure of the respondents was high at undergraduate degree levels while relative few of them had senior secondary level of education. This is an indication that the tourists were people that have attained some level of educational exposure. It has been established in literature that level of education has influenced on tourism activities especially in motivating people to travel in order to increase knowledge and experience. This study confirm the findings of Odege (2014) and Kwan et al. (2010), who agreed that educational level was significantly related to tourist's intentions to travel. While discussing the findings on the impacts of tourists' socio demographic characteristics on the travel motivation and satisfaction in protected areas in South China, it was reported that majority of the tourists had attained an undergraduate degree while fewer had only secondary level of education (Ma et al., 2015). Other reasons that have been adjudged for high level of education attainments of tourists to protected areas include the need to relax and escape from boredom, knowledge seeking and socialization, needless to say that less-educated people were more associated with the factors of prestige/impression and novelty (Kim et al., 2008; Jensen, 2012).

The percentage of male supersedes that of female although at a close range. This shows that both men and women alike patronise the ecolodge but men are more. This conforms to the findings of Javid and Roma (2016), who affirmed that, men are more compared to women

involvement in tourism-related activities.This, equally supports the findings of Ogunjinmi (2016) that more males are seen in public parks than female. This is contrary to the finding reported by Hu and Lu (2014) on gender variation in ecotourism sites in Zhejiang, China. This variation across geographical boundary could have been linked to the culture of the people in a region. For instance Wambani et al. (2020) affirmed that due to Nigerian culture which frowns at female travelling for recreation alone or without permission from the parents or husbands, the number of female in ecotourism destinations are few compared to that of the female. Although, Jensen (2012) did not discuss culture as travel motivation and choice of vacation but that are suggestions that Chinese culture is associated with socio demographic characteristics as reported by some authors (Li & Cai, 2012; Cheng Bao & Huang, 2014)

The findings revealed that active employment status is a significant attribute that is influencing tourist choice to embark on trips. This agrees with the report of Qiang Xiumei and Peng (2015) who asserted that civil servants and professionals have a good financial foundation and relatively regular vacation. Investigating the influence of Income and Age on visitation pattern of customers in this study, the empirical model estimates has established that income and age are the only significant socio-economic variable for predicting variation in customers' visitation pattern with R-Square as 0.283 (28.3%) and the adjusted R-square value as 0.281. This study agrees with that of Ma et al. (2018) that identified a positive correlation between monthly income and the social motivation of Chinese tourists. Kim et al. (2008) opined that in terms of income, tourists in higher income prioritized appreciation of nature and escape and relaxation as more important, while those in lower income groups showed a stronger preference for knowledge seeking. People with higher incomes tend to be more motivated by social influence, as they have a greater need to prove to their family and friends in high social positions that they are capable of travelling and gaining prestige (Pearce, 2013). Low income earners tend to engage in domestic tourism rather that international tourism (Chen & Tsai, 2007) simply because they could not afford the cost of travelling abroad.

The visitation pattern of the visitors to Obudu mountain resort and Cross River national park revealed information on the pull and push factors as they influence motivation and choice of destination. Chan and Baum, (2007) argues that the understanding of the pull and push motivational factors in travel decisions can be applied to understanding the ecotourists' behaviour in accommodation sector especially as it relates to ecolodge management in a competitive market economy. While push factors are described as the socio-psychological needs that encourage a person to travel (Yoon & Uysal, 2005), the pull factors aroused visitor by the attractions at the destination (Buhalis, 2000). This study indicates that sundry of the tourists travel to Obudu mountain resort and Cross River national park for pleasure and participates in tourism activities possibly due to the idyllic tranquillity, comfort and enchanting scenery. This finding is similar to Mohammed, Hairul, Musa and Aliyu (2014) empirical findings, which conclude that tourists who are impressed and excited, who feel relaxed with the eco destination they visit as a result of the attractive tangible attributes of the destination, will definitely feel satisfied, which will in turn strengthen their positive behaviour toward that destination. Other factors attached to the purpose of visit the selected destinations include preference for economic value and social values such as preference for cleanliness, safety and sustainable development. Omrod (2012) opined that cognitive, emotional, environmental influences and past experience play an important role on how people perceive the world. This also support the findings of Ezebilo (2014) that eco-tourists' choice of an ecotourism destination are influenced by factors such as, the family, friends, societal values, preferences, safety and promotions related to the destination.

This research finding equally indicates that sundry of the tourists travel to Obudu mountain resort and Cross River national park for pleasure and participates in tourism activities

possibly due to the idyllic tranquillity and enchanting scenery. This finding is similar to Cecilia and Zandivuta (2018) and Mohammed et al. (2014) empirical research , which concluded that tourists who are impressed and excited, who feel relaxed with the eco destination they visit as a result of the attractive tangible attributes of the destination, will definitely feel satisfied, which will in turn strengthen their positive behaviour toward that destination. Destination related attributes such as sunshine, sea, culture and history are the extrinsic variables that have been reported to determine the ultimate goal of tourists for engaging in activities which enhance their physical, social and psychological wellbeing and improved quality of life (Yousefi & Marzu, 2015).

The result of the study found that many of the tourist's priorities their preference of choosing eco-lodge over other destinations/accommodations due to its tourist heaven with inviting serene/natural endowment to be explored. It can be deduced that eco-tourists/customers have become more conscious of the importance of environmental friendly atmosphere, because many have come to term seeking to stay in environmentally-friendly destination when they travel. This is quite similar to the findings of Saayman and Saayman (2009), who observed that tourists are pushed to travel to National park because of their desire for nature. Visit to natural reserves represent one of the eight pull factors that motivate tourists to ecotourism destinations in Jordan as reported by (Mohammad & Som , 2010).

According to the finding, greater part of the respondents are recurrent travellers to Cross River National park and Obudu Mountain resorts for more than one time. According to the finding, greater part of the respondents are recurrent travellers to Cross River National park and Obudu Mountain resorts for more than one time. This is similar to the results of Meysam and Norhazliza (2020). Various reasons have been adjudged for ecotourists' re-visit which will invariably led to developing loyalty to the destination. Ecotourist who had good experience with a destination and derive satisfaction at the first time of visit will definitely re-visit (Lovell, 2012). Greater percentage of the tourists stayed more than 5 days at the selected destinations to have fun and enjoy attractions such as wildlife, serene/natural atmosphere and friendliness with the local people. This study supports the findings of Endalkachew and Endalew (2018) Munir and Omar (2013), who claimed that destination, attributes such as host community friendliness, attractive scenery, and natural environment can be used to assess the level of tourist satisfaction in a specific destination.

Conclusions

It can be deduced that eco-tourists/customers have become more conscious of the importance of environmental friendly atmosphere, because many have come to term seeking to stay in environmentally-friendly destination, pristine area and serene ambient when they travel. Nigeria is a multiethnic country with vast abundance of natural resources, species diversity zones, cultural multiplicity and other attractive features that can satisfy the yearning of eco tourists. Development of ecolodge accommodation as a segment of hospitality industry with blend of nature and culture will assist the country in diversifying the mono-economy that is at the brim of collapse. The relevance of information obtained on the socio-demographic characteristics, socio-psychological (push) and pull factors of visitors to Cross River National Park and Obudu Mountain Resorts in developing a marketing strategy in achieving economic revitalisation can therefore not be overemphasised as revealed in this study. Most importantly, the significant of income and age as motivating factors as they instigate visitation pattern of customers to the ecolodge in selected ecotourism destinations is noteworthy of positive relationship. In addition to these, the choice of sundry of tourists to Obudu mountain resort and Cross River national park are influenced by pull factors such as participating in tourism activities possibly due to the idyllic tranquillity, comfort, friendliness and pleasure. This did

not exclude considerations for attractive features such as nature, pristine environment, wildlife, cultural, economic and ecological values that are regarded as pull factors. The fact that certain number of the tourists is willing to re-visit the site is a clear demonstration of loyalty expressed based on the derived satisfaction at the first time of visit. Notwithstanding, the management of the selected sites need to improve on the provision of services offered to meet up with the expectations of long stayed visitors. This can only be achieved if the management authority takes cognisant of tourist preference of choosing these eco-lodges over other destinations/accommodations in other part of the country or across the World. Availability of updated information and generating accurate data as provided in this study will assist the management to stay ahead of trends, competitiveness and dynamism in the hospitality ecolodge tourism industry. Designing of marketing strategies for ecolodge products/services based on the available information on social demographic characteristics, pull and push factors are canvassed for policy implementation.

Sample collected in the two selected sites are not large enough, there is therefore a need to replicate this study across other ecological and geographical zones in Nigeria. Collection of information through the use of other research instruments such as Focus Group Discussion and Interview will allow presentation of qualitative data for comparative studies in this kind of research. This will allow incorporated human experience, facilitate further interaction and possible understanding of the attitudes of the respondents on motivation factors, visitor's patterns, choice and preference which could not be detected by a predetermined quantitative research instruments.

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