



Kidnappings of international tourists in Nigeria: Impacts on the hospitality sector

Kola O. Odeku

Faculty of Management and Law
University of Limpopo, South Africa
Email: kooacademics@gmail.com

ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3132-4545>

Abstract

Nigeria is facing all sorts of criminal and safety problems, one of which is kidnapping which seems to be very rampant and predominant in the country. The hospitality sector and in particular, the lodging and hotel accommodation seems to be most affected by kidnapping phenomenon in Nigeria. This is said against the backdrop that mostly, international tourists visiting and touring in Nigeria would be lodged in a hotel that have been reserved for them. The concern is that, these days, these hotels are no safer for foreign tourists in view of the constant and persistent kidnapping taking place in different parts of Nigeria. Apart from the lodgings being unsafe, it is also very dangerous for foreign tourists visiting Nigeria to use road transportation to their hotel accommodation or to go touring anywhere in Nigeria as these roads are also targeted by kidnappers. Most of the attempts at kidnapping in lodgings are often successful as the kidnappers work in collaboration with hotel workers and car hire services drivers who avail the kidnappers with necessary information about the movement, accommodation and destinations of the victims, mostly foreign visitors or tourists. Most of the perpetrators and those who provide information to them kidnap international tourists based on the belief that huge sum of money shall be paid as ransom by their family or their home government for their release. What is more disturbing and worrisome is that sometimes, the law enforcement agents, particularly the police officers are complicit in kidnapping by either being involved in the plot or blatantly refused to take any step or action to secure the release of kidnapped tourist hence raising the questions of being incompetent or complicit. In conclusion, this paper postulates that the issues of kidnapping of foreign tourists should be tackled and combated. To achieve this, government should unleash its various securities apparatus and personnel to preempt through intelligence, arrest and successfully prosecute kidnappers when they are caught.

Keywords: Abduction, Hostage, Foreign tourists, Ransom, Security, Lodging sector, Nigeria.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the act of kidnapping for various reasons has been evidenced in Nigeria, but was not really a major concern. However, in recent years, the prevalence of kidnapping in Nigeria has accelerated and it is becoming a major concern, especially to international foreign visitors, who are often the target of ruthless kidnappers (Bakare, 2020). Kidnapping is one of the social vices that Nigeria is currently faced with, and from all indications, due to the poor security system in the country, it seems conspicuous that the kidnappers have the upper hand against the law enforcement agencies who have the responsibility to ensure safety, peace and tranquility in the country (Maxwell, 2011). The act of kidnapping violates the fundamental rights to freedom of movement and association according to the Nigerian Constitution, and it is punishable under the Nigerian criminal codes and statutes. However, this has not deterred kidnappers (Ofo, 2010). Both national and local media houses print and electronically provide devastating kidnapping news on a daily basis of how innocent people have been kidnapped and also report on how the government and the law enforcement agencies are incapable of combatting the crime (Ukandu, 2011). Furthermore, what is also worrisome is that



it is impacting on tourism as international tourists are increasingly becoming afraid of being victims of kidnappings in Nigeria and they opt to visit other safer countries. This is having negative impact on the tourism foreign exchange earnings and revenues, growth and development in the Nigeria, especially weighing heavily on the lodging and the hospitality sector which have the “potentials to generate significant foreign exchange earnings, employment and investment towards economic development” (Adora, 2010).

According to Eziocha et al., (2015), the “...tourism sector in Nigeria is made up of hotels, catering, events, natural attractions (which include savannah, waterfalls, and rain forests), entertainment, and other forms of hospitality activities. Geographical sites, nature sites, religious sites, native sites, tourist zones and national parks are among the tourist sites in Nigeria.” Tourism is considered as one of the vehicles to enhance development in most of the developing countries hence the aggressive marketing of tourism and travels products by various marketing and tourist’s agents spread over the world (Hudson, 2008). International tourism enables seamless harmony when there is unhindered free movement of the people, capital and merchandise (Bianchi, 2006). Against the backdrop of this unhindered movement of people in and out of Nigeria, the extent to which the tourism industry contributes to socio-economic and political development of many countries in the world, particularly, Nigeria, is no longer in doubt. There is thus no doubt that tourism which is a very vital and popular global human activity has become a major sector of Nigerian economy (Udora, 2010).

Tourism is one of the major sources of revenue generation for Nigeria like other developing countries of the world (Adejumo et al., 2014). One fact that is quite glaring about tourism in Nigeria is that the sector has the potential to generate significant foreign exchange earnings, employment and investment towards economic development” (Adora, 2010). According to Eziocha et al., (2015):

...In spite of the volatility in the rate of revenue generated from inbound tourism, the performance of this sector has been encouraging. For instance, between 1995 and 2000, revenue from international tourism averaged US\$51.5 million. It increased to US\$67 million between 2001 and 2005. This impressive performance became more glaring between 2006 and 2010 when the revenue generated from inbound visitors to Nigeria skyrocketed to US\$427.8 million. Though it constituted only about 0.4 percent of the country’s total exports in 1995, by 2000, it formed 9 percent of the total exports...

With regard to the potential of international tourism and the overall benefits and opportunities it brings to the economy and the Nigerian society at large, Eziocha et al., (2015) asserts that tourism both domestic- inbound or international-outbound is one of the important variables that promote the economic growth through fiscal earnings and revenue generation of any country.

In most of the developing countries, tourism is a principal export for 83 percent of of them and the most significant source of foreign exchange after petroleum (Eziocha et al., 2015). International tourism involves the traveling of people to a country other than that in which they have their usual residence and that is the reason why many tourists travel to Nigeria to tour and visit different tourist, heritage and historical sites (Eziocha et al., 2015). International tourism contributes to Nigeria’s economic growth and development through “revenue earnings, cultural preservation, environmental protection, job creation, as well as poverty reduction...and it is a veritable source of foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria particularly the lodging and accommodation sector” (Eziocha et al., 2015). However, the kidnapping of foreign tourists is having a severe impact on the yearly foreign exchange revenue from international visitors and tourists because of the inherent fear they have that if they visit



Nigeria, they are likely to be kidnapped by the criminal kidnapers and held hostage for ransom (Shortland, 2017).

The growing insecurities are engendered by the kidnapping of foreign tourists, particularly foreign tourists in Nigeria who are often the target of kidnapers (Uzorma & Nwanegbo-Ben, 2014). Tourism entails the travelling to different places of interests which requires unhindered mobility and political stability in their places of visit. However, kidnapping has begun to radically reshape the parameters of mobility and the environments in which tourism operates (Bianchi 2006). Omonijo et al. (2019), described kidnapping as “an aggressive way of arresting people, irrespective of age, whisking them away to unknown environments in order to detain them against their wish until they satisfy the desires of their captors which is usually monetary”. Apart from the fact that it is an unwelcome act on the part of the victims, the act violates victims’ fundamental human rights as entrenched in the constitution and therefore it is punishable under the law. However, according to Omonijo et al., (2019) “despite this, kidnapping is on the increase and has earned Nigeria the 4th position in hostage-taking globally according to the American Bureau of Investigation (ABI).”

Against the backdrop of presenting the unhindered access of tourists to travel to anywhere in the world, ample and sufficient information on the destinations are also critically significant before such travel trips are undertaken (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). By providing international tourists with useful information about the destinations, this will make them prepare very well for the tour and make the visits memorable experiences as this is needed for achieving success in the highly competitive tourism marketplace (Jong-Hyeong, 2014). International tourists get information from different sources through the various media, travel agents and from the experiences of those who have visited the countries they intended travelling to (Law et al., 2014).

Sadly, when it comes to seeking information on whether to visit Nigeria or not, these days, the first information tourists often get about Nigeria is that there is serious safety and criminal activity problems hence, not conducive for international tourists to visit. The current safety and criminal challenge in Nigeria is the kidnapping phenomenon being perpetrated all over the country by criminals often in collaborations with law enforcement officers and personnel private security outfits employed by the hospitality sector to provide safety and security to the international tourists (Osumah & Aghedo, 2011; Adora , 2010). Furthermore, kidnapers often target international tourists residing in hotel accommodations and they often work in collaboration with some of the hotel staff members to perpetrate this criminal act (Bianchi 2006).

The kidnapping of international tourists in Nigeria has called for international and national assistance for adequate security measures to safeguard the lives, properties and wellbeing of international tourists in Nigeria (Adora , 2010). It is pertinent to point out the importance of the hospitality sector to international tourists in any country they visit because the sector provides a home away from home, hence the need for adequate safety measures and strategies perfectly in place. Safety and protection of lives and well-beings of guests in their accommodation facilities are the core business of the hospitality sector, ensuring that their guests feel safe and are well taken care of during their stay.

Negative news on security and safety concerns in Nigeria are posing as major impediments for international tourists visiting Nigeria. Worse still, the news being peddled in both national and international media houses about how kidnapers ply their criminal activities with impunity is scary and a source of discouragement for international tourists who want to visit Nigeria.



Methodology

Methodologically, this work used non-empirical historical research by solely relying on, and utilizing secondary sources of data relevant to the menace of kidnapping and how to combat this crime. In Nigeria, kidnapping is occurring on a daily basis which makes the crime a contemporary social malady hence the secondary data sources collected were from contemporary local and international scholarly literature and the information gathered from the sources were utilized and applied for purposes of presenting how kidnapping is affecting tourism as foreign tourists are fearful of being victims and unfortunately their supposedly safe place, their place of lodging such as hotels is often the target site for abduction. This study also emphasizes what government should do to tackle and combat the violent crime of kidnapping in Nigeria.

Problem statement

Kidnapping is a serious security threat to sustainable tourism development in Nigeria. According to Omonijo et al. (2019), "...kidnapping is a criminal and forceful act deliberately carried out against the wish of the victims mainly for monetary gain, forcefully or deceitfully." It is disturbing to watch international TV stations and newspapers issuing travel warnings to their citizens not to travel to Nigeria because of the safety problems the country is currently faced with. There is a general breakdown of law and security in the country, and criminals particularly, kidnappers are taking advantage of the breakdown to kidnap international tourists from their hotel accommodation mostly for monetary gains. This does not portray Nigeria as a viable tourist destination, and as such, foreign tourists have started avoiding to visiting Nigeria due to this lingering lack of ample security. Hence, kidnapping of international tourist is having serious negative impacts on the economic development of the country with direct impacts on the hospitality sector in Nigeria. Sadly, the government is not doing much to curb the kidnapping surge. What is also worrisome is that those who have responsibility to provide security and safety, such as the law enforcement agents have been either complicit or out-right participate in kidnapping of tourists from their lodgings.

Theoretical explanation and Literature Review

To kidnap a person simply means that the kidnapper has forcefully captured or seized the victim, restrained the person and ensured that the person is totally restricted. This can be likened to a false imprisonment because the person must have been confined against his/her will thereby violating the victim's right to movement (Chidi, 2014). Therefore, the theory of this work was to postulate and rely on the need that combating kidnapping which is a crime, and at the same time a social vice and menace, is imperative for any government and society. This assertion is apt because kidnapping has serious impacts on socioeconomic opportunities as news and reports of kidnapping of foreign tourists portray Nigeria as a dangerous tourist destination not to be visited by international tourists. For instance, countries like the USA have constantly warned their citizens not to travel to Nigeria due to safety concerns and issues. This has a huge socio-economic impact on the hospitality and tourism sectors. Therefore, tackling kidnapping is imperative for Nigeria in order to thrive in tourism which is one of the major sectors that has the capacity to boost employment, promote local entrepreneurship and alleviate poverty.

The founding theory on kidnapping can be as a reason of economic theory of trying to make ends meet at all costs. Another theory propounded is that kidnapping is basically based on the laws of demand and supply which is a social factor where the perpetrator looks for efficient means to achieve the desired ends. From the perspectives of these theories, while kidnapping is considered as a heinous crime, one could say categorically that it has some semblance of social enterprise



in form of business ventures where the kidnappers set out to kidnap victims but in most cases those victims are those that have the means and wherewithal to pay the ransom when demanded. This is why international tourists are prime targets for kidnapping in Nigeria. Nigerian kidnappers believe that foreign tourists are a fertile ground for ransom because the family, friends and government of the victim would do everything to pay for the release of the victim.

Kidnapping involves both crime causation and victimization theory. The kidnapper needs to weigh the implications of what he sets out to do and achieve which is often guided by the hedonistic principle or pleasure-seeking” tendency. Kidnappers are aware of the consequences of committing the crime. However, they continue to ply the crime because there is ample reward for any successful kidnapping which leads to payment of handsome ransoms. To this end, Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017) assert that “kidnapping and receiving a ransom for returning hostages can be viewed as special kind of ‘give and take’. The reciprocal characteristic of this type of crime is that, it involves giving and taking because the kidnappers ask for money or make demands for something other than money in exchange for the safe release of the victim.” Literature on kidnapping has revealed that kidnappers capture people under duress, thorough force or deceit and transport them to wherever they earmark as imprisonment abode which in most case are remote places with harsh conditions and environments (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017).

Kidnapping is becoming very popular and lucrative to the extent that kidnappers do not have any regard for the law any longer (Out et al., 2018). This form of holding a person without a legal authority or any authority to so do is tantamount to illegal confinement or imprisonment and as such it is perpetration of heinous crimes against the victim by the kidnapper. Nowadays, there is endemic kidnapping in Nigeria and as such, no one is free from its scourge. The attacks by kidnappers on international tourists is appalling. Some of the kidnappers are so emboldened that they enter hotels to abduct international tourists. Arrests that have been made sometimes indicate that some of the perpetrators engage in kidnapping for purposes of meeting socio-economic needs; some perpetrators have pleaded poverty while some have blamed their actions on lack of job opportunities. However, if pressed further, greed is often found to be the driver and motivation for committing the crime. What is more worrisome and concerning to the international community and Nigeria in particular, is that “over the decades, kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved into a lingering, pervasive security threat and fast-paced and multifaceted criminal enterprise. It is now perpetrated by diverse armed groups and criminal gangs operating across the country, on land and at sea, pursuing different agendas and driven by different motivations: political, ideological, financial, social and cultural” (Assanvo & Okereke, 2019). Nigeria is not winning in the aspect of eradication of kidnapping and this is affecting the hospitality sector of the country.

Combating Kidnapping of International tourists in Nigeria

In Nigeria, kidnapping is now a national security issue largely which needs to be addressed using different strategies and measures of combating the social menace (Okoli & Agada, 2014). Information being disseminated by most of the foreign media that Nigeria is a dangerous place to travel to because of the exponential increase in kidnapping of foreign tourists is very dire. As a matter of fact, the USA has consistently issued security warnings to its citizens on the danger of traveling to Nigeria and just of recent the USA put Nigeria on the immigration banning list of countries that have weak and poor intelligence and security on how to tackle, fight, prohibit and combat kidnapping and terrorism. A typical example of this was the travel warning issued in 2016 by the USA Department of State on its website where it “cautioned its citizens to avoid all travel to some states for security reasons, stating that the security there remains fluid and unpredictable...strongly urged US citizens in Nigeria to consider their own personal security and



to keep personal safety in the forefront of their travel planning... due to the risk of kidnappings, robberies and other armed attacks. The Department further advised all US citizens to be particularly vigilant around government security facilities; churches, mosques, and other places of worship; locations where large crowds may gather, such as hotels, clubs, bars, restaurants, markets, shopping malls; and other areas frequented by expatriates and foreign travelers” (Akpos, 2016). Undoubtedly, ample peace and tranquility are required for thriving socio, political and economic activities in country for purposes of attracting international tourists to the tourist destination country (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2010). There are strong linkages among tourism, peace and tranquility in any country and for tourism to thrive and deliver socio-economic opportunities for Nigeria especially those who are in hospitality sector, a conducive environment is necessary. In the words of Law et al., (2014) “...tourism is a human activity and can only survive in a peaceful environment.” Therefore, there should be an enhancement of human security in the tourism sector as a whole and the lodging sector in particular where there is ample security provided by the government and the private security sector to protect the people.

It is postulated that in order to tackle and defeat kidnapping in Nigeria, there should be holistic forward looking security remedies (Ayamba & Omini, 2009). To this end, it is the responsibility of the stakeholders and various role players of tourism to ensure the safety and security of tourists particularly, international tourists visiting Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2017).

Even though it is the responsibility of the government to ensure broad and efficient safety and security of lives and property, it is incumbent on lodging businesses to also be proactive and involve in providing private security at their accommodation and premises (Timothy & Teye, 2009). In addition, for there to be a formidable security that will tackle and fight kidnapping heads – on. The hospitality sector has constantly liaised with the government in order to form a joint security team on protection and ensure efficient and effective safety in the sector using the existing law enforcement apparatus of the government such as the police, army, navy, air force and hospitality businesses private security apparatus (Ukandu, 2011). Adora (2010) gives credence to this assertion by emphasizing that “crime and national security is a challenge faced by the present administration in Nigeria. It is in the security interest of all individuals, groups, and organizations’ which inhabit the territory of Nigeria to fight criminal activities and restore peace and order. The management of the tourism industry must therefore join security teams to fight criminal activities to ensure lasting peace and guarantee tourism”.

It is pertinent to have ample intelligence from the securities personnel of the government and for the hospitality sector to always be proactive and get information on possible security hazards involving kidnapping of international tourists in Nigeria (Brossman, 2016). Oftentimes events attracting international visitors and tourists in a particular place within the country are likely targets of the kidnappers because they know that the lodgings close to the events would accommodate most of the tourists and as such, kidnappers take advantage by perpetrating the crime of kidnapping for ransom in such places (Henderson, 2007).

Having identified kidnapping as a serious threat to events that attract international visitors and tourists, both government and private sector security personnel and law enforcement officers should always evaluate security hazards based on reliable intelligence in order to unravel and detect any kidnapping that could be perpetrated on foreign tourists and ‘nip it in the bud’ or if it manifests, at least be in a position and able to arrest the culprits forthwith (Adora, 2010). According to Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017) being proactive presupposes that law enforcement agents and private bodies should “apply preemptive neutralization counter attack measures. This includes capturing, killing or disabling criminal kidnappers before they can mount attack.”



Combating kidnapping also requires the owners of hotels, other types of lodgings and those who organize international events in Nigeria to use modern technology to secure their clients (Boateng, & Slota, 2015). More importantly, there should be tight security where foreign tourists are accommodated. The management of the hotels should upgrade their security systems by installing modern day security devices such as video surveillance (CCTV), putting electric wires round the security fences and property perimeter areas, and more importantly hiring competent security personnel to work for 24 hours a day (Fennelly & Perry. 2016).

Additionally, both government and the tourism sector should work closely and deploy foot and motorized patrol systems to monitor various vulnerable areas particularly areas where foreign tourists lodge and visit (Leung et al., 2018). This measure has the potential of ensuring that criminals can be apprehended before they unleash terror and this will help to keep the vicinity safe and ward off potential criminal activities. The deployment of the Highway Patrol Method where security personnel patrol the highways in order to apprehend kidnappers is also important and plays major role in proactively curbing criminal activities that usually occur on the highways and roads leading to and from the tourist destinations and other tourism activities areas at all times. Constant patrols would be an impetus for forestalling any likelihood of criminal activity before it is implemented.

Combating kidnapping of foreign tourists would also involve the deployment of effective video surveillance in popular tourist attraction sites such as heritage sites and historical sites. Communities and people situated where tourists often visit and tour should also be part of the strategy to combat kidnapping of foreign tourists. Government and security operatives should involve and enlist the cooperation of members of the communities especially communities where tourist sites and destinations are located. The community members should assist in supplying information or reporting indiscriminate and suspicious movement or activities of persons suspected to be kidnappers to the security operatives of the government or the hotel accommodation where the foreign tourist reside. Adopting this strategy would, undoubtedly, guarantee the security of foreign tourists at any sites and events. Obviously, if this is sustained, it will boost the overall image of Nigeria as a safe tourist destination rather than as a risky destination.

Conclusion

Kidnapping, particularly of foreign tourists seems to be on the exponential increase in Nigeria largely because of the rewards and incentives the criminals receive in exchange for their victims. Most times, kidnappers target hotels where foreign tourists lodge to abduct them for ransom. Captured victims are usually ready to do everything humanly possible to secure their release, pleading to their home government or close family members to pay the ransom demanded in order to avoid being killed by the heartless kidnappers. What seems to be very nebulous is the involvement of government and private security officers that are complicit in the practice and their involvement in the criminal enterprise of abduction and kidnapping. Government needs to up its game by ensuring that there is broad effective and efficient security in place to curb and defeat kidnapping which is now ravaging tourism industry.

Recommendations

The abduction of foreigners, particularly foreign tourists usually attract much attention Nigeria and all over the world. This is the reason why it is critically imperative for the Nigerian government to do everything within its power to curb the menace. Nigeria is the most populous country in the



sub-Saharan Africa. The country has different heritage and historical sites and as such, it is a tourist destination that international tourists want to visit and tour. However, the violent crime of kidnapping is an impediment often preventing tourists from visiting the country. This said, the international community and foreign countries should be part of the fight against kidnapping to compliment Nigerian efforts in combating kidnapping. Hence the support and assistance of the international community is necessary to be able to successfully eliminate kidnapping.

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