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Research article

HOSPITALITY SERVICE READINESS AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT THE CALABAR CARNIVAL, NIGERIA

Ogar, Angela Andornimye^{1&2} & Utam, Angelica Andorshiye¹

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Studies¹ & Federal Polytechnic Nyak-Shendam²

**Corresponding authors' emails: angelaogar88@gmail.com; angelutam18@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Festivals generate destination value only when visitors can access dependable hospitality services before, during and after the event. This study assessed hospitality readiness and visitor-experience outcomes associated with the Calabar Carnival in Nigeria. It used a secondary descriptive analysis of an archived survey involving 400 purposively selected festival participants and stakeholders within the Calabar festival environment. Aggregate frequencies were reorganised around destination demand, tourism-oriented business effects, infrastructure, government support, environmental awareness, satisfaction, recommendation and future attendance. The results showed that 65.0% perceived at least a slight increase in tourist influx, but only 47.5% identified increased business activity or job opportunities as the principal economic benefit. Infrastructure challenges were significant or moderate for 47.5%, local-government support was rated ineffective by 52.5%, and 80.0% reported limited or absent tourist environmental awareness. Overall dissatisfaction reached 42.5%; nevertheless, 62.5% were at least somewhat likely to recommend the carnival and 70.0% remained definite or potential future attendees. These results indicate demand potential without commensurate destination-service readiness. The study concludes that accommodation coordination, transport information, sanitation, customer-care training, local sourcing, environmental communication and service monitoring should be integrated into Calabar Carnival planning.

KEYWORDS

hospitality services, visitor experience, festival tourism, service readiness, destination management, Calabar South

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural festivals are temporary attractions, but their hospitality requirements are concrete and immediate. Visitors need information, transport, accommodation, food, sanitation, safety, interpretation and responsive service. These touchpoints shape the perceived quality of both the event and the destination. When demand rises temporarily without coordinated service capacity, congestion, inconsistent prices, poor hygiene and information failures can displace the cultural value that motivated travel.

The Calabar Carnival provides Calabar and Cross River State with opportunities to strengthen cultural tourism, destination visibility and local enterprise. Yet the presence of visitors does not automatically produce inclusive economic benefits. Local businesses must be prepared to supply appropriate products, retain expenditure and meet service expectations. Government agencies and carnival organisers must also coordinate public infrastructure, accommodation, transport, visitor information and environmental management. A hospitality perspective is therefore distinct from a general tourism-development assessment: it asks whether the destination service system is ready to receive, serve and retain carnival visitors.

The attached studies provide a 400-participant survey with measures of tourist influx, economic benefits, infrastructure, public support, environmental awareness, satisfaction and intentions. This paper reanalyses those measures as a hospitality service chain. The purpose is to assess demand signals, service readiness, visitor evaluation and market retention while remaining within the limits of the available aggregate evidence.

The objectives were to (a) evaluate perceived visitor demand and local business effects associated with the Calabar Carnival; (b) assess infrastructure and institutional readiness; (c) examine environmental information and overall satisfaction; and (d) evaluate recommendation and future-attendance intentions. The study asks whether hospitality capacity is commensurate with the demand potential attributed to the carnival.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Festival hospitality as a destination service system

Hospitality at a festival extends beyond hotels and restaurants. It includes every organised encounter that enables visitors to arrive, orient themselves, participate comfortably and depart safely. Event tourism research positions the event within a broader destination system involving accommodation, transport, attractions, public services and community relations (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016). Service failure in one component can influence the evaluation of the entire visit because the visitor experiences these elements as an interconnected journey.

The host location is consequently part of the hospitality product. Leenders et al. (2015) emphasise that location conditions festival performance. For Calabar South, road access, wayfinding, neighbourhood sanitation, public conveniences, accommodation information and the spatial organisation of trading activity can either extend or constrain the destination value of cultural performances.

Service quality, satisfaction and loyalty

SERVQUAL conceptualises perceived service quality through gaps between expectations and performance across reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Although developed for service firms, these dimensions are relevant to festival hospitality: visitors expect accurate information, clean facilities, safe food, courteous interactions, dependable schedules and visible competence. A festival should not import the instrument mechanically, but it can adapt these dimensions to culturally specific touchpoints.

Satisfaction is an overall post-consumption judgement, while recommendation and return intention are behavioural outcomes. Baker and Crompton (2000) demonstrate that quality and satisfaction are related but distinct predictors of festival behaviour. Oliver (1999) further explains that loyalty strengthens when favourable evaluations are repeated. In cultural settings, affective attachment may encourage return even

when functional quality is imperfect; therefore, high intention cannot substitute for direct service measurement.

Local enterprise and economic retention

Festival expenditure can circulate through accommodation, food, transport, crafts and retail, but gross attendance does not reveal how much value remains locally. Gursoy et al. (2004) show that organisers and residents perceive both benefits and costs. Economic retention depends on local procurement, vendor access, business readiness and the length of stay. If visitors bring supplies, stay outside the host area or encounter limited product availability, increased attendance may have little effect on local livelihoods.

Hospitality development should therefore move beyond temporary vending. Training, quality assurance, digital visibility, transparent stall allocation and links between cultural producers and accommodation businesses can turn episodic demand into capability development. These arrangements also help protect authenticity because local enterprises become interpreters and beneficiaries of heritage rather than peripheral sellers.

Infrastructure, governance and environmental responsibility

Hospitality quality is partly produced through public goods. Roads, drainage, waste collection, security and public information are rarely controlled by a single business. Public-sector effectiveness and stakeholder trust therefore influence service reliability (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2017). A destination-management approach assigns responsibilities before the event and uses measurable service standards during delivery.

Environmental awareness is also an experience and risk-management issue. Visitors need clear guidance on waste, sensitive cultural spaces, photography, noise and acceptable conduct. When such information is absent, negative impacts can accumulate and residents may bear costs that are invisible in visitor counts. Balanced event evaluation must include community well-being and environmental pressure (Deery & Jago, 2010).

Analytical framework and gap

This study treats festival hospitality as a sequence: perceived demand creates service pressure; infrastructure, governance and environmental communication represent readiness; satisfaction captures experience; and recommendation and future attendance indicate retention. The original materials did not analyse this chain explicitly. The current paper fills that conceptual gap through transparent descriptive reorganisation while avoiding causal claims unsupported by the aggregate dataset.

METHODOLOGY

Design and context

A secondary quantitative descriptive design was used. The study context was the Calabar Carnival environment in Calabar metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The approach was selected because the archived records contained completed aggregate survey results but not respondent-level data suitable for inferential modelling.

Population and sampling

The source study estimated a population of approximately 8,300 active festival participants and stakeholders within the Calabar festival environment. A purposive sample of 400 knowledgeable participants was selected for the survey. The non-probability design enabled the inclusion of persons familiar with festival operations and visitor activity, but it cannot be assumed to represent every resident, visitor or tourism enterprise associated with the Calabar Carnival.

Variables and analysis

Demand indicators comprised perceived change in tourist influx. Economic outcomes comprised increased local business and job opportunities. Readiness indicators comprised infrastructure challenges and effectiveness of local-government support. Responsible hospitality was represented by perceived tourist environmental awareness. Experience and retention were represented by overall satisfaction, recommendation and future attendance. Frequencies and percentages were recalculated and checked against $n = 400$. Where categories were combined, the original values are still displayed so readers can audit the calculation.

Validity, ethics and analytical limits

The source materials reported expert review, piloting and triangulation; however, no coefficient of reliability or item-level validity evidence was available for independent verification. The present study therefore interprets each item as a descriptive indicator rather than a validated latent scale. The source survey described participation as voluntary and anonymous. This secondary analysis used no personal data and generated no new participant contact.

RESULTS

Table 1. Perceived tourism demand during the carnival

Perceived change in tourist influx	Frequency	Percent	Interpretation
Substantial increase	100	25.0	Strong demand signal
Slight increase	160	40.0	Moderate demand signal
No noticeable change	140	35.0	No demand signal
Total	400	100.0	—

Sixty-five percent perceived at least some increase in tourist influx, comprising 25.0% who observed a substantial increase and 40.0% who observed a slight increase. The result identifies a demand opportunity but also shows that only one quarter observed a strong increase. Hospitality investment should therefore be calibrated to verified attendance and stay data rather than promotional assumptions.

Table 2. Perceived community economic benefits

Principal perceived benefit	Frequency	Percent	Hospitality implication
Increased local businesses	80	20.0	Greater trading activity
Job-creation opportunities	110	27.5	Temporary or indirect employment
Negligible economic impact	210	52.5	Weak local value capture
Total	400	100.0	—

More than half (52.5%) reported negligible economic impact, while 47.5% identified either business growth or job opportunities. Thus, perceived visitor demand did not translate into equally strong local value capture. The 17.5-percentage-point difference between perceived demand growth (65.0%) and identifiable economic benefit (47.5%) suggests leakage, limited enterprise readiness or insufficient visitor spending duration.

Table 3. Destination service-readiness indicators

Indicator	Favourable/none n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Adverse n (%)
Infrastructure challenges	210 (52.5 none/negligible)	110 (27.5)	80 (20.0 significant)
Local-government support	70 (17.5 very effective)	120 (30.0)	210 (52.5 ineffective)
Tourist environmental awareness	80 (20.0 well informed)	130 (32.5 limited)	190 (47.5 absent)

Readiness is uneven. While 52.5% reported no major infrastructure effect, 47.5% experienced moderate or significant challenges. Government support was assessed more negatively, with 52.5% rating it ineffective. Environmental communication was the weakest dimension: 80.0% believed tourist awareness was limited or absent. The results point to coordination and information failures alongside physical constraints.

Table 4. Visitor experience and market-retention indicators

Indicator	Most favourable n (%)	Conditional n (%)	Unfavourable n (%)	Favourable + conditional
Overall satisfaction	90 (22.5)	140 (35.0)	170 (42.5)	230 (57.5%)
Recommendation	100 (25.0)	150 (37.5)	150 (37.5)	250 (62.5%)
Future attendance	150 (37.5)	130 (32.5)	120 (30.0)	280 (70.0%)

Only 22.5% were very satisfied, and 42.5% were dissatisfied. Recommendation was somewhat stronger, and future attendance was strongest: 70.0% were definite or possible future attendees. The progressive rise from favourable satisfaction (57.5%) to favourable or conditional future attendance (70.0%) indicates retention potential, but much of it remains conditional rather than secure.

DISCUSSION

The central finding is a mismatch between perceived festival demand and hospitality value capture. Almost two thirds observed increased tourist influx, yet more than half perceived negligible community economic impact. This qualifies the common assumption that visitor growth automatically improves host livelihoods. It aligns with Gursoy et al. (2004), who emphasise that festival impacts are multidimensional and perceived unevenly. The result suggests a need to measure visitor expenditure, local procurement and length of stay rather than treating attendance as an economic proxy.

Infrastructure findings are neither wholly negative nor reassuring. A narrow majority perceived negligible impact, but 47.5% reported at least moderate constraints. Because festival demand is spatially and temporally concentrated, problems affecting nearly half of respondents can materially degrade experience. The finding supports Leenders et al. (2015), who link festival outcomes to host location, and the destination-system perspective of Getz and Page (2016). Transport schedules, accommodation directories, sanitation and wayfinding should be planned as one service chain.

The ineffective rating of government support by 52.5% is consistent with the importance of institutional trust identified by Gursoy and Kendall (2006) and Gursoy et al. (2017). It contradicts a ceremonial model of public involvement in which visibility is mistaken for service delivery. Hospitality readiness requires assigned responsibilities, performance standards and coordination with private operators. These arrangements are especially important for public conveniences, traffic management, safety and waste services that individual businesses cannot supply efficiently.

Environmental awareness is the clearest hospitality deficit. Four in five respondents believed visitors had limited or no awareness. This finding extends Deery and Jago's (2010) insistence on evaluating social costs: poor environmental communication can transfer clean-up burdens and cultural risks to residents. Visitor codes, multilingual signage, waste stations, trained guides and pre-arrival messages should be incorporated into hospitality operations, not treated as optional conservation publicity. The satisfaction result also deserves caution. A 42.5% dissatisfied segment is inconsistent with claims of strong service performance. Yet recommendation and future attendance are comparatively favourable. Baker and Crompton (2000) distinguish perceived quality, satisfaction and behaviour, while Oliver (1999) shows that loyalty has cognitive and affective dimensions. Cultural attachment may therefore support revisit intention despite functional service gaps. This does not contradict service-quality theory; rather, it shows that symbolic value may moderate the consequences of imperfect service in heritage settings.

From a SERVQUAL perspective, the data signal likely weaknesses in tangibles (infrastructure and sanitation), reliability (institutional delivery), responsiveness (visitor information) and assurance (environmental and cultural guidance). Because the original questionnaire did not measure these dimensions directly, this interpretation is a framework for future measurement, not a post-hoc scale result. A dedicated hospitality instrument should test these relationships with respondent-level data.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Calabar Carnival shows credible demand and visitor-retention potential, but hospitality readiness and local economic capture remain insufficient. The destination cannot rely on carnival attraction alone. Weak government support, incomplete infrastructure, poor environmental awareness and substantial dissatisfaction limit the conversion of carnival attendance into a high-quality visitor economy.

The study recommends an integrated Calabar Carnival hospitality plan built around seven actions: (1) create a verified accommodation, food, transport and attraction directory; (2) train frontline vendors, guides and transport operators in customer care, hygiene, pricing transparency and cultural interpretation; (3) establish local procurement and vendor-accreditation systems; (4) coordinate traffic, sanitation, public conveniences, security and emergency response; (5) provide pre-arrival and on-site environmental guidance; (6) develop packages that extend visitor stay and disperse spending to local enterprises; and (7) monitor occupancy, expenditure, complaints, satisfaction and revisit intention after every edition.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purposive sample consisted of active community participants rather than a verified sample of overnight visitors, and the dataset was available only in aggregate form. The paper therefore reports perceptions of hospitality outcomes, not audited

tourism flows or business accounts. Future research should survey residents, day visitors, overnight tourists and enterprises separately; record origin, length of stay, accommodation type and expenditure; and use validated service-quality measures with multivariate analysis.

DECLARATIONS

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