SOCIAL AND MEDICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ICT IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the prospects of attaining social and medical wellbeing through tourism and hospitality industry in the contemporary ever-dynamic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven age. The paper specifically focuses on teleconferencing technology. Its uses and benefits were given attention so also are its effects on hospitality sector and its impact on the social and medical wellbeing of the people. The thesis of this paper was anchored on the promising status of this technology in Nigeria in terms of adoption among the people; the likely negative implications of this technology on the hospitality if fully embraced were also noted. This was done within the available statistics on international tourism arrival into the country as well as the current trends in recreational attitudes and tourism patronage at domestic level.   The main concern here is that in no distance time Nigeria will surely be overwhelmed by this value system of digital culture. With lack luster attitude to conventional leisure and recreation and ineffective tourism management in Nigeria, what will become of the hospitality sector when everybody per adventure decided to embrace ICT to take care of their overseas activities rather than take to travelling? What effects will this have on social and medical wellbeing of the citizenry? These and other issues formed the major concerns of this paper. While this clearly points at the need for reorientation of the people on the advantages in leisure and recreation and necessity of a developed domestic tourism, suggestions were equally made on what to do to prevent the shock that may arise as a result of non-preparedness.

Keywords: Teleconference, Technology, Hospitality, Digital age, Web, Video

Introduction

Man continues to be insatiable with its environment hence the emergence of culture of moving around even from their own homes on short term and temporary visits. Such mobility either within or outside their own countries is done for a host of reasons, which range from vacation, business, conference, visiting friends and relatives, and so on. During this period, the basic provisions for food, drinks, and accommodation become inevitable. It is within this backdrop that the issue of *hospitality* emerged. Awosanya (2016) noted that hospitality as a concept encompasses accommodation (the provision of a roof shelter or sleeping facilities), and catering (the provision of food and drinks).

Hospitality is a phenomenon that usually draws two things to mind; this includes caring and entertainment. Elebor (1995) sees hospitality as friendly and generous reception, and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers into one's group or home with goodwill and cordiality. From whatever perspectives hospitality is viewed, the meeting point is the issue of rendering services to make live comfortable for the end-users. These services therefore make it central to tourism industry; this is because any successful outing in the field of tourism is a product of accompanied hospitality. The idea here is that whether tourists leave home for leisure or business, the basic necessity of life, which include food, drinks and accommodation must be met. The quality of hospitality (accommodation and catering) therefore has an enormous influence on the success of any tour. The meaning of hospitality is providing a

safe and enjoyable environment for patrons. Hospitality industry thrives in the presence of dynamic tourism sector because it is the supplier of the services for tourism. The implication of this is that an 'organic' relationship exists between hospitality and tourism sectors because the purpose of the people for travelling to destinations where they want to experience recreational and leisure activities (tourism activities) becomes worthwhile with accommodation, food and beverage (hospitality services).

In Nigeria, studies have been showing steady increase in level of apathy towards recreation and tourism by the citizenry. Many Nigerians were noted as lacking in knowledge of the essence of leisure, which was attributed as a major contributing factor to low level of development of tourism culture, poor awareness of how recreation can help in improving the quality of one's mental and physical well-being. The resultant effects of the foregoing were asserted as robbing the citizenry the benefit of knowing that recreation as part of tourism activities provides payoffs for the individuals by redeeming them from routine and fatigue through participation in recreational activities especially those activities that enhance the exhibition of creative ability, achievement of self-fulfillment and relief from day-to-day stress.

Lack of knowledge of the essence of recreation further reflected in the general attitude of Nigerians with respect to the provision of recreational facilities (Igbojekwe, *et al.,* 2013) hence the indifference to the provision of recreation facilities by urban planners and public officials (Akinola-Arikawe, 1985). These revelations in contrast to what obtains in more developed countries such as the United States of America and Britain where the provision of recreational facilities have long been made a routine component of plans for urban cities and the society at large (Linden, Ike, and Voogd, 2004; Wates, 2000; Newman and Thornley, 1996; Harris, 1989). Unlike the scenario in Nigeria, individuals in developed countries especially in United States of America have the culture of consciously saving towards leisure trips to places of tourist interest and attractions within their country and in different parts of the world thereby contributing immensely to the growth of domestic tourism (Lou-Hon and Uysal, 1994).

Poor attitude towards conservation of nature and environmental resources (Okunola and Lawal, 2013; Marguba, 2001; Aina, 2000; Gbadegesin, 2000a, 2000b; Ayeni, 1995; Bashir, 1995; Fuwape and

Onyekwelu, 1995; Fuwape, 1991) is another manifestation of Nigerians' indifference to recreation. This has further entrenched the people's inability to turn these resources into revenue generating ventures by developing them as tourist attractions. The sum total of this is responsible for the under-utilization of existing tourist and recreational facilities that abound in Nigeria. The subsequent result of this is the frustration being experienced by the private investors within the industry because of low patronage received by their investments. Yahaya (2017) lent credence to this with observation that the little boost being enjoyed by the tourism industry in Nigeria was a product of the patronage by the international tourists. This observation by Yahaya (2017) portends a grim picture of tourism future in Nigeria. The question here is that, what would be the future of tourism in Nigeria in this digital age where virtually every segment of the society continues to be engulfed by the ever-expanding influence of information and communication technologies? What would be the prospect of attaining social and medical wellbeing through tourism and hospitality industry in the face of an ever-dynamic information and communication technology driven age? The concern arose as a result of the way information and communication technology (ICT) is affecting every facet of human life either positively or negatively, and the possibility that hospitality industry will not be an exception, especially since some of the key factors which can warrant this are already here and available particularly the Internet and other emerging technologies like 'teleconferencing technology' (a type of ICT).

For instance, when GSM (Global System for Mobile Telecommunication) came, several people resisted it, but some years after, the reverse is the case. Secondly, the Internet, which came almost the same time, is gradually taking the usual 'toll' this time of good effect on all and sundry. Moreover, during the past twenty years or more, the technology, specifically the ICT has advanced so well, and to such an extent that almost everyone everywhere comes into contact with it in one way or the other (Preece *et al.,* 1994). At this point, it is necessary to know what Teleconferencing is all about.

Conceptual Clarification of Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing is an interactive group communication that involves several people in two or more locations, through the use of electronic

medium (Teck-Kuen and Pheanis, 2008; Rogan and Simmons, 1984). The process has the ability to bring people together under one roof even though they are separated by hundreds of kilometers (Rogan and Simmons, 1984). The term teleconferencing may be a meeting or conference held via a telephone or network connection between participants in remote cities or work sites. Teleconference can also refer to a live event that is transmitted via satellite to various locations simultaneously (Teck-Kuen and Pheanis, 2008).

There are many types of teleconference meeting, but the simplest form of it involves the use of a speakerphone at each location to conduct an audio conference. The breakthrough in ICT has engendered more sophisticated teleconference meeting which made possible the exchange of both audio, video and text-like data/information transmission; all happening simultaneously and seamlessly. In a broad term, teleconference includes a variety of options, but the basics for all teleconferencing involve the use of telecommunication equipments by users at multiple locations thus ensuring collaborative communication between the participants. The followings are the commonly employed teleconference technology: Audio graphic, video teleconferencing or conferencing and Web conferencing.

Audio graphics allows participants to share graphics (either still graphics or motion graphics commonly known as animation), documents, and video. To achieve this, additional equipment such as electronic tablets, scanners, webcams, and voice data terminals are employed. *Video teleconferencing* uses additional equipment, which is primarily a television camera to establish a face-to-face meeting that incorporates the ability for each participant to view each other at all locations. Teleconferencing can also be conducted online, along with other types of online conferencing services using all forms of Internet Relay Chart (IRC) resources such as messengers, e-mail, and so on. All these are very useful alternative ways and yet similar to teleconferencing techniques that are found everywhere and within the reach of all irrespective of status. In addition, with the Internet, companies can now use both live web feedback and audio to conduct meetings and make result-oriented business plan (Firestone *et al.,* 2007; Cook and Haver, 1994; Chapanis *et al.*, 1977).

Video teleconferencing enables individuals or groups in distant locations to hold virtual meetings while sharing real-time video materials (data/information) between the participants (Ferran and Watts, 2008; Wolfe, 2007). In the case of web conferencing, the participants also share electronic documents with other team members. Web conferencing is clearly a very advantageous way of handling important business communication between clients and colleagues who are in very different locations. Its possibility and ability is due to advances in the speed and efficiency of the Internet (Ferran and Watts, 2008; Gharai *et al.,* 2002); while the ability and possibility of the Internet is due to the presence of high speed performing communication devices such as computers, telephones, radio equipments, satellite, and others on one hand, and factors like the presence of high skilled personnel who man the equipments as well as the ever-decreasing price of the needed equipment as compared to a proportional increase in the capacity in terms of processing speed and efficiency of performance.

Uses and Benefits of Teleconferencing Technology

Web conferencing can be an alternative to traditional teleconferencing or the two can be combined to provide a better conferencing experience. Multiple participants through this system use web-based text messaging to communicate with each other. The software in use here typically includes features, which allow participants to display part or all of their computer desktops with other conference users (Arapis *et al.,* 1998; Gemmell and Bell, 1997). Web camera is one of the main features, which make this possible. Video conferencing can be used in a host of different environments, which is one of the reasons the technology is so popular. General uses for video conferencing include business meetings, educational training or instruction and collaboration among health officials or other representatives. So far, video conferencing has been used in the field of telemedicine, telecommunication, education, surveillance, security, and emergency response (Breiteneder *et al.,* 1996).

In whatever form this technology may appear, the aim is to increase productivity (Gemmell and Bell, 1997). To ensure this, teleconferencing technology has provided businesses with an entirely new way of communicating over long distances. In fact, it helps business save money on travel expenses and has also helped business owners increase productivity of their business through provision of ability to communicate via telecommunication methods (Teck-Kuen and Pheanis, 2008; Liu and Zarki, 2004;

Breiteneder *et al.,* 1996; Arapis *et al.,* 1998; Gemmell and Bell, 1997). Teleconferencing technology gives businesses the ability to have meeting over long distances, conduct business briefings, employees training sessions, workshops, seminars, lectures, and more between individuals who might not otherwise be able to easily get together. With various web conferencing features, businesses can benefit together from the use of special software applications like that in Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and can transmit various images from one place to another within a matter of moments. Conversely, a simplistic method of web conferencing includes using instant messaging system and privately designed chat rooms in which business executives can conduct discussions, meetings, planning of projects and more (Curry *et al.,* 2012). At the same time, it is also available to individuals in their homes.

Effects of Teleconferencing on Hospitality Sector as an Arm of Tourism Industry

Considering its relevance and effects on human life in general, one should note that teleconferencing technology like all other forms of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is impacting greatly on all facets of human endeavours. With this technology, there is no need of traveling over a long distance before businesses could be conducted. At the same time, travel related costs (lodgings, airfare, and meals) are no longer there. These avoided expenses could now be ploughed back into the business for optimum results and fantastic dividends. Along with this is the prospect of reduction in rate of accidents, traffic congestion and environmental pollution that usually occur due to influx of people into the community. This is because vehicular movement will be less as a result of people confining themselves to the comfort of their homes and offices to communicate with business partners in far distances, courtesy of improved ICT. It is therefore very difficult to ignore the benefits that teleconferencing technology brings and is still capable of bringing to establishments, and to individuals employing its usage. From this, it is pertinent to note that its popular adoption as a necessity in human dealings for optimal productivity is a matter of time.

However, as these positive sides are being revealed, it will also be of immense value to look at the other side of the continuum, especially the effects of this technology on the service sector of tourism industry, particularly the hotels and guest houses. As said earlier the concern of this paper is to know the situation of things within this discourse in developing societies like Nigeria. It becomes more imperative in view of the fact that hotels have come to stay as veritable ventures and indispensable arm of tourism industry particularly at this point in time, when attention is being shifted to tourism in developing countries as a veritable means of supplementing their revenue drives. In developed countries where teleconference technology has become widely accepted and highly employed, the issue of vacations is always given high priority by the people therein. Such vacation periods are usually spent by visiting exotic places with fantastic tourist attractions that are spread across the globe. As a result of these visits, incomes in foreign currencies are generated by the host countries. However, in a country like Nigeria where people have poor attitude towards hotel patronage (Igbojekwe, 2013; Lawal and Asala, 2008; Akinola-Arikawe, 1985), the patronage of tourist attractions was never encouraging likewise the hospitality sector. The survival of hospitality sector is hanging on the grace provided through the patronage from those on business/conference tour.

Table 1 shows data from World Tourism Organisation (2017) on international tourist arrivals across the world with specific reference to African countries. Algeria recorded 1.4 million in 2010; 2 million in 2011, 2.3 million in 2014 and 1.7 million in 2015. Kenya on the other hand had 1.3 million in 2010; 1.4 million in 2011; 1.2 million in 2014 and 1.1 million in 2015. Within the same periods under review, Morocco and South Africa records appreciated from 2010 till 2014. South Africa record dropped slightly in 2015 but appreciated in 2016 while on the other hand, Morocco maintained its advancement in terms of tourists' arrival till 2016. The rate of appreciable performance commences from 2010 till 2015 for Benin Republic, Cape Verde, Central Africa Republic, Mauritius, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and others (see table 1). In Nigeria, the story was not encouraging in spite of her endowment in terms of tourism resources. In 2010, 1 million tourist arrivals were recorded in Nigeria, this increased to 1.5 million in 2011, in 2014 and 2016 no record was available on rate of tourist arrivals into the country. However, a total of 1.2 million was recorded in 2015 which was less than what was recorded in 2011 (UNWTO, 2017).

Table 1: International Tourist Arrivals (2010 – 2016) for African Countries

Countries	2010	2011	2014	2015	2016
Algeria	1,443,000	2,070,000	2,301,000	1,710,000	-
Angola	210,000	425,000	595,000	592,000	-
Benin	176,000	199,000	242,000	255,000	-
Burkina Faso	245,000	274,000	191,000	163,000	-
Cape Verde	198,000	336,000	494,000	520,000	598,000
Central African Republic	12,000	54,000	96,000	121,000	
Chad	29,000	71,000	122,000	120,000	-
Cote d'Ivoire	-	252,000	471,000	1,441,000	-
Ethiopia	227,000	468,000	770,000	864,000	-
Gambia	108,000	91,000	156,000	135,000	
Ghana	429,000	931,000	825,000	897,000	-
Kenya	1,399,000	1,470,000	1,261,000	1,114,000	
Madagascar	277,000	196,000	222,000	244,000	293,000
Malawi	438,000	746,000	819,000	805,000	-
Mali	143,000	169,000	168,000	159,000	-
Mauritius	761,000	935,000	1,039,000	1,151,000	1,275,000
Morocco	5,843,000	9,288,000	10,283,000	10,177,000	10,332,000
Mozambique	578,000	1,718,000	1,661,000	1,552,000	1,639,000
Niger	58,000	74,000	135,000	135,000	-
Nigeria	1,010,000	1,555,000	-	1,255,000	-
Reunion	409,000	421,000	406,000	426,000	458,000
Senegal	769,000	900,000	963,000	1,007,000	-
Seychelles	129,000	175,000	233,000	276,000	303,000
Sierra Leone	40,000	39,000	44,000	24,000	54,000
South Africa	7,369,000	8,074,000	9,549,000	8,904,000	10,044,000
Sudan	246,000	495,000	684,000	741,000	-
Swaziland	837,000	868,000	939,000	873,000	947,000
Tanzania	590,000	754,000	1,113,000	1,104,000	-
Togo	81,000	202,000	282,000	273,000	-
Tunisia	6,378,000	7,828,000	7,163,000	5,359,000	5,724,000
Uganda	468,000	946,000	1,266,000	1,303,000	-
Zambia	669,000	815,000	947,000	932,000	956,000
Zimbabwe	1,559,000	2,239,000	1,880,000	2,057,000	2,168,000

Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) – Tourism Barometer
Data as collected by UNWTO June, 2017

Nigeria as an adopter of Information and Communication Technologies could still experience unprecedented rate of adoption in short possible time. With expositions that Nigerians have poor recreation/tourism culture (Igbojekwe, Okoli and Ugo-Okoro, 2013), tourism sector may not survive as ICTs are being widely adopted if one considers the revelation of Malan (2006). According to Malan (2006), 60% of tourists' arrival to Nigeria came for business/conference purpose; 13% on visitation to their friends and relatives; only 5% for vacation while 20% came for other issues (not classified) and another 2% unaccounted for by the author. Assuming the statistics presented by Malan (2006) still remain valid till date, it then means that 60% of these arrivals who came for business/conference purpose may decide to carry out these activities through various ICT resources without necessarily wasting their money for travelling to Nigeria. Also,

13% on visitation to their friends and relatives may decide to interact with their loved ones through social media like Twitter, Telephone Conversations etc. By the objective of teleconferencing technology, which is to save the people the trouble of frequent traveling and maximize costs, it is necessary to inquire on what will become of tourism and hospitality industries in Nigeria if she should lose the 60 percent of tourists entering the country for business/conference purposes?

Implications of ICT adoption on Tourism Situation, Social and Medical Wellbeing

Where a country is well-prepared, ICT penetration (in whatever guise or mode) into economic system will make little or no damage. With positive economic environment on ground, it will end up in

consolidating what it met on ground by creating a virile populace and robust economic system. A society of this nature must have developed culture of participation in recreation activities (an aspect of tourism). Recreation in such clime often time remains means by which individuals engage in stress reduction, engendering opportunity for relaxation, rest and revitalization. Embedded benefits therein always serve as major motivator in the usage of recreation. The personal rewards and satisfaction people achieve through their participation further indicated that recreation has been accepted by the participants as an integral component of life as well as the means of providing the impetus for work and participation in community activities.

On the other hand, society that is ill-prepared will obviously experience a scary situation. It is obvious that as poor economic returns set in as revenue being generated from this sector is dwindling thereby leading to downsizing of manpower in the sector. When this happens, it may increase the rate of unemployment in the country, and the dependants of the laid-off manpower will also feel the hardship. The resultant effect of this will be increasing social vices in the society and aggravation of security system of the country. The effect of economic insecurity may spread like wildfire among the populace. This will lead to more commitment to jobs and little time for rest or recreation for those who are lucky to keep their jobs. It may also lead to total apathy in the usage of domestic tourism resources for physical and mental development. Working round the clock in order to make ends-meet will eventually lead to stressful lifestyle, increase in health problems and lower productivity at work. Creativity for dynamism in professional life may be lost or reduced drastically. A situation of this that is not well managed will give room to poverty and social exclusion, fear of unknown over job security, and subsequently the adoption of coping strategies like taking alcohol, drug and tobacco.

Aside this, development and maintenance of environmental infrastructural facilities such as planting in public parks and gardens, upgrading of street amenities, clearing of derelict land may not be possible. This will be due to inadequacy of finance to effect constant attendance to such infrastructural facilities and absence or drastic reduction in patronage of existing facilities. With this in place, local communities will lose their hard-earned positive image as boisterous tourist destinations and subsequently inability to attract investment of all kinds. In such situation, detrimental environmental activities such as unplanned tree felling, destruction of coral reefs and damage to wildlife species may not be ruled out and likely to be widespread in the name of making-ends-meet by the gradually impoverished residents. Highly prevalent in such situation will equally be an increasing disregard for public health practices, overcrowding of cities, rise in population of disease-carrying vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks. At household level, communities will be vulnerable to poor sanitation and unsafe water sources. Water-borne diseases and illnesses due to poor hygiene will be contributing immensely to the disease burden. Respiratory infections that are mostly caused by smoke from charcoal, wood, and other biomass fuels are potential health burden to be experienced.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that people found in this situation are already enmeshed social and medical quagmire. This is because Fajemilehin (2016) postulated wellbeing to entail an equilibrium or otherwise between environmental factors such as winds, temperature, water, soil and food, and an individual's way of life. Such way of life is supposed to include the individual eating, drinking and sexual habits as well as work and recreational behaviour. In this situation, emerging challenges will lead to disarticulation of people's ways of life thereby preventing equilibrium for optimal wellness. At the end of the day, development and accumulation of stress in day to day activities may become more pronounced. In line with Marmot (2004) and Raphael (2004) observation of similar scenario, the stress thus accumulated will damage health, increases the risk of disease; lead to poverty and social exclusion, which will cost lives; job insecurity, unemployment, causes illness and premature death; absence of viable social supports and supportive networks because substantial proportion of the populace would have become vulnerable to the unfolding calamities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Outright reliance on international tourists' arrivals for the country to reap tourism-endowed economic dividends therefore portends grave dangers for sustainable development. This could however be avoided for a functional social and medical wellbeing where positive tourism culture is developed among the populace. The first step toward this is to have a virile and sustainable tourism sector where necessary facilities are in place for unbroken chain of patronage

from both domestic and international tourism. As this is bringing about good health, it will equally assist economic development and subsequently provide the means by which the available tourism resources could be further developed. Equally worthy of mentioning among the benefits are what Goudie and Ladd (1999) and Goodwin *et al.* (1997) listed as infrastructural development, revenue and employment generation, international peace and understanding. Peaceful and understanding populace will further usher in an enabling environment for provision of facilities like good road network, steady supply of water and electricity, good communication network, efficient security system, hospitable destination and so on (Oduyoye, 1994). These infrastructures will enhance accessibility of tourist destinations and subsequently the tourism growth. To this end, the following are possible suggestions, which could make the task a worthwhile affair:

Private Partners/Stakeholders

- Every hotel operator in the country should be serious and committed to working together as a formidable association (irrespective of whether it is publicly or privately owned). When seriousness and commitment are established within such association of this nature, necessary backing (be it legal, moral, financial or whatever) should be given to it because it has the task of keeping the hotels in business. Whatever is invested in this task will assist the sector and prevent unnecessary reliance on government's assistance which may not come more so, that government is already in the process of shedding some of its responsibilities to the private individuals and organisations in the name of *privatization*. This task could obviously be onerous, but would certainly ensure a safe landing for the hospitality sector as a whole in the case of unpalatable eventuality from emerging technology in the country.

- The association in question on behalf of its members should liaise with the mass media (as an important organ of the society) to develop the tourism industry, through the projection of Nigeria's cultural heritage far and wide. Both prints and electronic media have very important roles to play in this regard. Through this, interest in tourism will be awakened at domestic level, and the tourism frontiers will also be developed for positive patronage by the

international tourists. So by the time teleconferencing is full blown, improved patronage from other types of tourists aside from business tourists would have conveniently cushioned the shock that would have emanated.

- Hotels and other forms of hospitality sector should be established at rural areas, and every point where we have tourists' attractions in Nigeria. This should be of international standards to accommodate visitors. This will prevent the agony of having to travel far distances for accommodation, and thus encourage further patronage.

Public Partners/Stakeholders

- In conjunction with the anthropologists and other experts in the field, efforts should be made to revive various dying cultures in the country, and where necessary introduce innovations in such a way that it will not remove the natural flavours from such festivals. Collaborate with other well-meaning individuals and corporate bodies to improve the transport and communication systems particularly land and air transports should also complement this.

- Educate and raise awareness among the populace on the need for positive behavioural change towards their cultural affinity and the need for their participation in tourism and encourage them to receive visitors in their midst. At the same time, effort should be made to develop and publish national programs that are of tourist interest including cultural calendar, conference schedules for national and international awareness. This will make the country a place where people will be looking forward to visit for one cultural festival or the other. The overall implication of this is that a very viable avenue would be opened up for the hospitality sector to both showcase and market their products and also further their sustenance.

- Aggressive marketing is another option. This involves organizing large-scale advertising campaigns overseas on availability of festivals as tourists' attractions in the country. On the same note information system should be overhauled by placing information about various festivals, arts and crafts available as souvenirs on the Internet for wide circulation.

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