# DESTINATION BRANDING CAPABILITY AND BEACH TOURISM PATRONAGE IN AKWA-IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Gaining and sustaining appreciable level of tourists' patronage is a difficult and challenging task for some tourist destinations in Akwa- Ibom. This study evaluated the effect of destination branding capability on the patronage of tourist beaches, based on the perspectives of beach tourists/visitors in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of domestic and foreign tourists at 4 beaches) in Akwa Ibom State during the 2019 Christmas and New year holiday from which a sample of 323 visitors was drawn using Freud and Williams formula for sample size determination from an infinite population. Primary data were collected from a well-structured questionnaire and administered on the visitors/tourists at four beaches in Akwa Ibom State, and secondary data from academic journal papers, textbooks, and internet resources. Statistical tools for data analyses include; descriptive analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and, Regression Analysis. The findings of the descriptive analysis revealed destination deficiencies in experiential and cultural differentiations as low patronage of the beaches. The study concludes that destination branding capability had a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction but insignificant effect on revisit intention. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended adequate tourism funding by that Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Tourism and Culture and to come up with beach concept, design and pictorial images for the beaches as well as focusing its destination branding campaign on experiential differentiation that projects a memorable and satisfying experience for sun, sand and sea (beach) tourists.**

**Keywords: Destination, Branding Capabilities.**

## INTRODUCTION:

Today, tourism is one of the fastest and largest industries in the world, generating huge earnings for those countries that are investing in tourism destination marketing, especially in Europe, America, Asia and North Africa (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). Therefore, it is logical to think that it is the country, place or region that can project the most positive image that will likely attract tourists (Nworah 2007). This view is supported by Braymer (2003) cited in Nworah (2007: 46) who predicted that "countries will compete daily with neighbors or block regions for tourism. Those countries that start with an unknown image or poor reputation will be limited or marginalized as they cannot easily boost their commercial success". Morgan (2002) had earlier predicted that "the battle for customers in tomorrow's destination marketplace will be fought not over the price but over hearts and mind." Thus, an understanding of tourist psychology as it concerns perception and the ability to position tourism services are crucial in

destination marketing warfare, especially as it relates to tourism patronage, especially the behavioural elements such as tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. It also requires an understanding of what persuades tourists to visit a place or their preference for a particular destination which reflects the emotional connection they feel towards the destination. Morgan & Pritchard (2009) assert that destination branding influences destination choice and other positive outcomes because of the emotional appeal, high conversational capital and celebrity value that the brand identity creates. Viewed from that perspective, destination branding capability reflects the destination's equity and distinctiveness (Rop, 2015).

Singh (2018) asserts that destination branding serves as an identifier and differentiator of a destination, and conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is particular to the destination to create a unique destination image capable of influencing tourists decision to visit the destination. Therefore, destination branding capability is a deliberate attempt to create a unique destination image or personality capable of appealing to tourists as well as differentiating the destination from competing for a destination beyond the tangibles.

Research suggests that countries, regions, states or cities with superior branding capability have used it to market educational, medical and religious tourism actively. For example, the UK government markets its education brand globally through the British Council, the Department for international development (DFID), UK Embassies and education fairs organized by Universities in the UK and overseas. Nworah (2007) established a strong correlation between branding capability and tourists' destination choice as well as investment behaviour. He argued that it is the branding capabilities of the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Canada, France, etc. in positioning their education and recreational tourist products that attract millions of international students and tourists to those countries, generating millions of pounds and dollars in revenue in the process. Unfortunately, Nigeria, despite her huge tourist attraction resources has not attracted appreciable number of international tourists. Consequently, the patronage of her tourist sites across the country in terms of tourist arrivals and tourist receipts have been dismal (UNWTO, 2018). Akwa-Ibom State, like other states of Nigeria, are endowed with natural and cultural tourist assets and sites, but not well known outside the state, and only visited by few domestic tourists. This ugly situation, among other things, has been blamed on poor marketing approach which may include destination branding deficiency. Adopting appropriate branding strategies to draw tourists may be socially rewarding to the destination operators, host communities and the growth of the tourism industry.

Although the role of branding capability in supporting and improving organizational performance of manufactured products and financial services has been established in both developed and developing economies, however, there is limited knowledge in the destination marketing literature on the influence of destination branding capability on tourists' patronage in Nigeria. Given Nigeria's abysmal tourism patronage, the objective of this study is to evaluate destination branding capability and its effect on tourism patronage in terms of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention in beach destinations context in Nigeria, drawing our empirical analysis from beach visitors in Akwa-Ibom State.

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### 2. 1. Destination Branding Capability:

Agbonifoh, Ogwo, Nnolim and Nkamnebe (2007) view branding as a way of distinguishing a company's product and service offering from those of competitors**.** Therefore, branding capability is the capacity of a firm to differentiate its products from competitive offers, especially as perceived by the target market segment (Chacko, 1997)). Nworah (2007) defined branding as the process that gives a product, service, organization or personality unique identity and image such that it is easily and positively identifiable and distinct from the competitors.

When applied to the beach tourism destination, branding capability refers to the ability of a country, region, state, or locale to positively distinguish it from other beaches in such a way that enhances the image of the place for tourism (Jaisemani, 2013). Ibrahim and Gill (2005) argue that a beach may be differentiated on the bases of its tropical sand and water quality, facilities orthe friendliness of its local people, relaxing atmosphere, aquatic life and availability of water sports and activities.

Taking a general destination perspective, Nworah (2007) views destination branding as a process whereby a town, region or country actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself to position it internally and externally as a good destination for tourism, trade and investment. This differentiation capability can be appreciated by the way some countries are positioned; for example, some destinations such as the Bahamas, Jamaica and other Caribbean countries are branded as places of exotic natural beauties. France and Italy are differentiated as destinations of fashion, styles and elegance. London is known for its heritage, while the United States of America is positioned as a destination of prestige and power (Ceyloni, 2011).

Branding has traditionally been associated with manufactured products and services rather than with countries, place and cities. However, globalization and competitiveness in international and domestic tourism across the globe have created the need for the use of branding as a strategic imperative in the tourism marketplace. Nworah (2007) observed that government and countries are increasingly using branding to sell their regions and countries to the rest of the world. The objective is to increase their international profile, attract foreign direct investments and make the place ideal destinations for tourism and trade. The implication is that just as companies adopt branding to distinguish their product/services from competitive brands, tourism destinations can also be distinguished and positioned to enjoy a competitive advantage through the instrumentality of branding.

Destination brands assure visitors of quality experiences, reduce visitor search costs and offer a way for destinations to establish a unique selling proposition (Konecnik, 2007). Nworah (2007) argues that destinations branding requires certain capability which many countries lack with grave consequences. The ability of countries such as India, UK, USA, South Africa, Malaysia and Sydney to execute successful branding campaigns and supported by a conducive environment has brought many benefits to these countries. 'The UK is Ok', 'Proudly South African', Uganda's Gifted by nature', 'I love New York' and 'Malaysia's truly Asia' are examples of place branding campaigns executed to attract both tourists and potential investors to the various places. Conversely, Nigeria's image project campaign 'Heart-of-Africa' with the slogan: "*Good people, good nation"* was a failure because it was founded on a shaky foundation: the negative factors that gave Nigeria a bad international image have not been

addressed. Consequently, public relations and media hypes were short-lived (Nworah,2007).

**Beach Tourism Patronage:**

Dodds and Holmes (2019) define beach tourism as travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes specifically on beaches. Beach tourists' patronage therefore, implies tourists continued visit to beaches to see and feel the sea breeze and saltwater and participate in activities as well as enjoy the experience created by the beach facilities and environment (Lam-González, Carmelo and Javier (2019). Globally, beach tourism is one of the most popular types of recreational tourism with high-drawing power and socio-economic benefits for host communities and destination operators. It is often epitomized by the "3Ss"-sun, sand and sea to create a safe, stable and attractive coastal environment with clean waters and healthy coastal habitats (Lucrezi & Saayman, 2015). Ibeno beach and others in Ibaka, Utaewa and Nwaniba in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria draw visitors from far and because of their unique features. In the context of this study, beach tourism patronage is considered along two subjective dimensions (tourist satisfaction and revisit intention).

**2.2 Tourist Satisfaction:**

Chen, Huang and Petrik (2016) define tourist satisfaction as the extent of the tourist's fulfillment pleasure which occurred from the trip experience about a product or service feature that fulfills the tourist's desires, expectations and wants in association with the trip. Satisfaction is created by the comparison of the customer's expectation before and after consumption. In the tourism context, satisfaction is primarily considered a function of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. The tourist is satisfied when experiences go beyond the expectations. However, if the tourist feels displeasure, dissatisfaction will be the expected outcome (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Furthermore, Chenini and Touati (2018) state that tourist satisfaction is an overall evaluation of destination performance based on all prior experiences of the tourist with it. Thus, a tourist who receives what he or she expected in terms "of pleasurably memorable touristic experience" is most likely to be satisfied. Based on the above statement, there is an understanding that two different dimensions cause tourists' satisfaction: firstly, it is related to the pre-expectation of the tourist before the travel; and secondly, it is referred to the justification of the tourist on the delivered services after the trip, and based on the real experiences.

From the general consumer behavior perspective, satisfaction is, therefore, a subjective opinion based on the assessment by the tourist after living different experiences in a place (Mininao,2017). In this regard, tourist satisfaction with a destination is essentially what the tourist expects. In other words, it is the fulfillment of an expectation expressed as the tourist's affective and cognitive states of his experiences in the destination. Affective state of tourist satisfaction is concerned with how the tourist feels about the destination, in terms of his motivation based on the appearance of the destination, its attractions and emotional qualities in matching the tourists' psychological needs. The cognitive state of tourist satisfaction refers to the objective knowledge of the destination or quality of the physical characteristics of the environment. It is also a set of beliefs of the people, ideas and impressions. From this perspective, one can argue that tourist satisfaction is a positive assessment by the tourist of the functional and hedonic benefits obtained in the place, or a sum of judgments regarding the quality perceived by the tourist (Marinao,2017).

Functional benefit is the fulfillment of the tourist's cognitive needs by experiencing the qualities of the destination. Marinao (2017) argues that a functional benefit perceived by the tourist is crucial factor in destination choice and satisfaction. Chacko (1997) asserts that although the beauty of a destination, the architecture of a palace and historical artifacts in a museum may produce a functional benefit, they are not themselves, the benefits. Chacko further explains the benefits as what the attributes do for the visitor, for example, a sensation of grandeur, an aura of prestige or the gaining of knowledge.

Bowen and Chen (2011) note that the hedonic benefit perceived by the tourist is the enjoyment of the experience generated by service associated with the fantasies and feelings about the destination. Thus, it is reasonable to think that hedonic benefit perceived by the tourist is crucial in the process of selecting a destination and tourist satisfaction at the place. In this way, the perceived enjoyment benefit associated with the destination can become tools for evaluating tourist satisfaction.

Furthermore, there is a symbolic dimension to tourist satisfaction. Marinao (2017) refers to the symbolic benefits perceived by the tourist as the benefit received through the many elements of self-concept, arising from the assessment of others; whether real or imagined. The symbolic benefit is easily discernable when tourists visit places that convey a symbolic meaning to them or others, for example, a tourist vacationing at a destination visited in the past by important personalities such as presidents, famous musicians, actors, athletes, etc. That way, through the perceived symbolic benefit, the tourist feels a sense of importance and belonging that the destination generates.

Boit and Doh (2014) perceive tourist satisfaction as a business term, a measure of how products and services supplied by tourism service providers match or surpass tourists' expectation. In the tourism context, the tourists, visitors, guests or passengers are the customers. Also, it is considered a key performance indicator within the tourism business and a source of competitive advantage (Kozack, 2012). Tourist satisfaction is, therefore, a tourism business philosophy which pertains the creation of value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations and demonstrating the ability to satisfy their needs. It is also the degree of overall pleasure or contentment felt by a customer, resulting from the ability of the service to fulfill the customer's desires, expectations and needs in relation to the service (Anderson & Fornell, 2004). However, Hui, Wan and Ho (2007) opine that "what matters is not how satisfied destinations keep their customers, but how many satisfied customers they keep". This perspective tends to suggest that satisfaction is not evaluated from the standpoint of organizations-how they feel about customers' retention, but the number of satisfied and loyal customers.

Generally, Darsono and Junaedi (2006) posit that satisfaction is an outcome resulting from a consumption experience, while others conceptualize it as an evaluation of the consumption process. When a consumer claims to be satisfied with the product or service, he means he likes the way it has performed in use. Satisfaction attitudes are retrospective evaluations of the product based on experience. Hunt (2000), argued that consumer satisfaction with a product refers to the favorableness of the individual's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experience associated with buying or using it. It serves as a feedback mechanism which enables destination to reevaluate their offers to tourists whether or not it has met the market segment's expectations. For these reasons, Xia, Jie, Chaolin and Feng (2009) opine that satisfaction is an important research area

for both practitioners and academics. Yet, there is limited knowledge regarding the tourist satisfaction index on the tourism scorecard of Nigeria, hence the need to investigate this facet of destination marketing performance.

**2.3 Revisit Intention:**

Researchers widely agree that the mere measurement of repeat purchase does not capture the full qualitative measures of marketing performance. They argue that repeat purchase or repeat visit alone is too simplistic and does not capture the multidimensionality of the construct of loyalty. Han and Back (2008) suggest an attitudinal dimension to customer loyalty. Mascarenhas, Kesavan and Bemacchi; 2006:92) defined customer repurchase intention as a "deeply-held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future. In that way, attitudinal loyalty causes repeat purchase pattern. Supporting the above perspective Doherty & Nelson (2008) define attitudinal loyalty as the intention of a consumer to continue his/her relationship with the organization in the future, regardless of whether competitors lower their offering prices. Also, repurchase intention is hypothesized as the willingness to recommend friends and the intention to continue to patronize the organization. Smith and Rangaswamy (2010) argue that attitudinal loyalty represents a higher-order or long-term commitment of a customer to an organization or destination that cannot be inferred by merely observing customer repeat purchase behaviour, often resulting in an outcome of a long, fruitful relationship between the organization and the customers over time-based on customer satisfaction ((Kumar & Shah, 2004).

In the tourism destination context, Hayes (2016) refers to repurchase intention as tourist's or visitor's attitudinal loyalty to a destination or tourist organization which could be put succinctly as "intention to revisit" or revisit intention". The importance of tourist attitudinal loyalty is well documented in tourism research. Fridgen (2006) reports that international tourism agencies and national tourist organizations use tourist revisit intention in tourism forecast, which is crucial in predicting or determining tourist flow and spending, especially in measuring destination competitiveness. This, clearly shows that tourist revisit intention is very significant in building tourism patronage, tourist flow and expenditure. In this regard, it is reasonable to think that revisit intention result from tourist satisfaction is very crucial to the tourism destination market performance audit, especially when evaluated from the lens of visitors. Accordingly, Hayes (2016), argue that it is important to operationalize the revisit intention to reflect those attitudes and behaviors that will have a positive impact on the destination patronage/value. He explained that whether a destination uses an objective measurement approach or a subjective measurement approach, revisit intention metrics need to reflect retention loyalty, advocacy loyalty and purchasing loyalty.

**2.4 Empirical Review:**
**Destination Branding Capability and Tourists' Patronage:**

Many empirical studies have supported the ability of a destination to distinguish itself from its rivals positively.

Singh (2018) studied the relationship between a brand experience (sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual dimensions) and the tourist's satisfaction. The finding revealed that brand experience was very important in building up an eloquent and long-lasting relationship with consumers. The result implies that the tourists' anticipated and actual experienced uniqueness of a destination is

crucial to their satisfaction, which is an important factor for any place to emerge as a leading or backward tourist destination the world.

Pereira, Limberger. DaSilva, Flores and Pereira (2018) carried out a study to test the proposition of the influence of destination branding on image formation and loyalty. Drawing from a sample of 301 international tourists to tourist destinations in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the results revealed that the features of destination branding did influence the image the tourists had about the destination and by extension, loyalty. The study also established a positive influence of tourism destination image on loyalty. Thus, Dop (2017) argues that branding capability influences destination loyalty; consequently, the marketing performance of tourist organizations or destinations through satisfaction.

Research conducted by Ezeuduji, November, and Haupt (2016) investigated tourist profile and destination brand perception. The analysis of data obtained from 220 tourists visiting Cape Town through the questionnaire revealed that good service quality, facilities, memorable visit, valuable visit, friendliness and hospitability generated positive destination image and loyalty. Khamwon and Rachbuakoat (2016) studied the relationship among destination brand experience, satisfaction, and word of mouth in Chiang Khan in Loei province, Thailand. The results of the study revealed that destination brand experience, composed of sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual experience, has the direct and indirect influence on word of mouth through satisfaction. Worlu, Adekanbi, Ajagbe, Isiavwe and Oke (2015) investigated the relationship between the brand identity of tourist destination and patronage. The findings of the study revealed that the creation and continuous development of brand identity had a positive effect on tourists'

perception, destination choice and satisfaction and revisit intention. Similarly, the study by Methuie (2015) corroborates the statement above, thus, revealing that branding capability at destination level has an effect on the tourism actors in a destination in terms of how the tourist or visitor perceives tourist sites, hotels, shopping malls, cinemas, restaurants and other leisure settings, which in turn, influences travel and purchase behavior and ultimately satisfaction.

Boit and Doh (2014) investigated the role of destination attributes and visitor satisfaction on tourist repeat visit intentions at lake Nakuru National Park, Kenya. Using an on-site questionnaire survey; the results indicated that the image the respondents held about the park as a distinct place for relaxation supported visitor satisfaction and in turn, influenced repeat visit. Thus suggests a positive correlation between destination branding and performance; because a positive destination image generated by branding capability can engender destination choice, satisfaction, loyalty and recommendations to others. Sreilla and Duryoni (2014) studied the influence of residents' identification with a tourism destination brand on their behavior. Results from a survey of 371 residents in Hawaii showed positive relationships between residents' identification with their destination brand and satisfaction and revisit intention arising from memorable experiences generated by the uniqueness of leisure activities at the destination. Results imply that destination marketing organizations and tourism service providers should understand the importance of the internal branding processes among residents, and should incorporate them into their destination branding strategy.

Research conducted by Qu, Kim and In (2011) on a model of destination branding with regard to integrating the concept of the branding and destination image revealed that ability to

differentiate touristic attraction products by the destination positively created a positive image for the destination which supported tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. Consequently, customer patronage leads to an increase in revenue which improves marketing performance of a destination.

Abdul, Muhammad and Akhtar (2011) investigated factors affecting brand loyalty by drawing the empirical analysis from fast-food restaurants customers. The findings revealed that brand knowledge, brand social responsibility, brand name, product quality, word of mouth and brand trust positively correlated with brand trust, brand loyalty and profitability; drawing their antecedents from customer satisfaction.

Ibrahim and Gill (2005) conducted an important study on a positioning strategy for a tourist destination, based on the analysis of customers' perceptions and satisfaction among 400 beach tourists in Barbados. A significant finding of the study was that while the primary reason tourists visited Barbados was because of its tropical sandy beaches, the distinguishing characteristics were the friendly local people, relaxing atmosphere, aquatic life and availability of water sports and activities.

Research conducted by Kim and Kim (2005) on the effect of brand equity on hotel performance revealed that branding capability positively affected revenue per room. The finding implies that those hotels with good reputation attracted more guests. Their continued patronage emanates from satisfaction which creates loyalty for the hotels and by extension, enhanced their revenue base. Woo and Kim (2004) investigated the relationship between customer-based restaurant brand equity and customer loyalty. Based on a sample of restaurant customers, the study tested four elements of brand equity, namely brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived quality. Analyzing the elements, the researchers found out that brand awareness had a strong and direct effect on revenues, while loyalty had the least effect.

Although the studies mentioned above have established a nexus between destination branding capability and marketing performance, however, the extent to which this proposition might apply to the Nigerian beach tourism situation ought to be tested. Hence, our hypotheses are stated thus:

**H1:** Destination branding capability has a significant effect on beach tourists' satisfaction in Akwa-Ibom State.

**H2:** Destination branding capability has a significant effect on beach tourists' revisit intention in Akwa-Ibom State.

## METHODOLOGY:

### Research Design and Participants:

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study because it helped the researcher to find answers to the research questions of the study and to test the hypotheses. The population of this study included domestic and international visitors available at Ibeno beach, Nwaniba beach, Ibaka beach and Utaewa beaches during the Christmas (2019)and New year (January 1[st Jan, 2020]) holiday season in Akwa-Ibom State. Diesamm (2012) has noted that in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, the population of research involving customers is always large, unpredictable, mobile and transient. It is often not fixed; for example, the likelihood of a researcher meeting the same beach visitor or air passenger again at the same place in the future is slim.

### Sampling/Sample Size Determination:

The purposive sampling method was adopted to select the sample based on the researcher's judgment and on-the-spot

accessibility, availability and willingness of the beach visitors to participate in the study during the researcher's visits to the beaches. The sample size used in this study was determined by the application of Freund & Williams (1992) formula. Thus, three hundred and twenty-three (323) beach visitors constituted the sample size of the study. Our sample size is consistent with the extant suggestion of Roscue (1975 cited in Aliman et al., 2016) that a sample of more than 30 and less than 500 is sufficient for most research in the Social Sciences of which Tourism is a subset. Quota sampling was also adopted in the selection of the sample subjects because of variation in the level of beach development and the destination's drawing power. This sampling method is evident in the number of visitors drawn from each of the four beaches surveyed in the study. As Udall & Eneyo (2011:216) rightly stated, "there is no best sampling method; the nature of the study should dictate the method to be used". The implication is that both probability and non-probability sampling methods are acceptable in tourism/hospitality research.

**Research Instrument, Procedure and Measures:**

Primary data were obtained from the respondents through the questionnaire, while secondary data were generated from relevant academic journals and textbooks in tourism marketing. The questionnaire was the primary data collection instrument for this study. A questionnaire is a set of specific questions that are constructed and used by the researcher in obtaining information from respondents in a survey research (Makinde 2015). The researcher and ten (10) research assistants administered copies of questionnaires on tourists/visitors visiting the four beaches for fun during the 2019 Christmas and 2020 New year holiday season in Akwa Ibom State. Visitors/tourists were briefed on the purpose of the study and the questionnaires retrieved after completion. The dependent and independent variables were measured on the 5-point Likert Scale, and the response scales for each statement in the survey questionnaire are 5-Strongly Agree, 4 –Agree Fairly Strongly, 3-Agree, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire items of the variables were modified from previous studies based on their relevance and appropriateness to the present study. Four (4) items on destination branding capability were modified from Boit & Doh (2014), in terms of differentiations based on authentic culture/host community attitude, experiential value, natural features of the beaches and image of peace and safety. Tourists' patronage was measured using tourist satisfaction, modified from Marimao (2017) and revisit intention from Aliman et al. (2016).

**Validity, Reliability and Analytical Techniques:**

In this study, the various types of validity adopted were: face validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Face validity for the research instrument used was ascertained through expert opinions and contributions. Also, it was assessed by tourism experts such as tourist managers, tour operators and marketing scholars based on their experience in the industry and academia respectively. Reliability was determined using (i) Cronbach Alpha co-efficient (0.7 and above) and (iii) factor analysis, composite reliability and average variance extract as well as correlation matrix for testing how the combination of measures constituted valid and reliable factors. The descriptive data were analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores and other descriptive statistical measures, all in tables with the aid of the SPSS & Microsoft Excel. Regression analysis was used for the hypotheses. This analytical tool is often used to examine the existence of the linear relationship between a dependent

variable and a set of (more than two) independent variables (Onodugo, Ugwuonah & Ebinne,2010). For this study, the simple linear regression analysis was adopted to determine the predictive power of the independent variable (destination branding capability) in explaining tourists' patronage (dependent variable) in terms of tourists'/visitors' satisfaction and revisit intention.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:
### Demographic Profile of Respondents:

Section 1 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on the category of visitors. The table revealed that (37) respondents (12%) were foreign while (271) respondents (88%) were domestic. This, implies that domestic respondents were of the majority. Section 2 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on the type of visitors. The table revealed that (36) respondents (12%) were companies staff, (10) respondents (3%) were Government officials, while (262) respondents (85%) were independent visitors. Therefore, independent visitors were of the majority. Section 3 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on the length of stay. The table revealed that (203) respondents (66%) stay for 1 day while (105) respondents (34%) stay for 2 – 5 days. This result points out that majority of the respondents stayed for 1 day. Section 4 of Table 4.2 above shows the information on age brackets of the respondents. 101 respondents (33%), were within 18-30 years, 83 respondents (27%) were within 31–40 years, 70 respondents (23%) were within 41–50 years while 54 respondents (17%) were greater than 51 years. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within the ages of 18 – 30 years. Section 5 of Table 4.2 shows the marital status of respondents. 169 respondents (56%) were single, 101 respondents (33%) were married, 20 respondents (6%) were divorced, while 18 respondents (5%) are separated. This

information implies that majority of the respondents were single. Section 6 of Table 4.4 shows the gender of respondents. 172 respondents (56%) were male, while 136 respondents (44%) were female. This information implies that majority of the respondents were male.

Section 7 of Table 4.2 shows the educational background of respondents. FSLC (31) (10%), WASC/GCE (62) (20%), OND (48) (15%), B.Sc/HND (103) (33%), M.Sc/MBA (54) (17%), Ph.D (6) (2%), Others (10) (3%). From the information it shows that respondents with B.SC/HND are of the majority. Section 8 of Table 4.2 shows the state of origin of visitors. 227 respondents (74%) were from Akwa-Ibom, 51 respondents (17%) were from Cross River state, 8 respondents (6%) were from Rivers, 7 respondents (2%) were from South East, while 5 respondents (1%) were from Delta. From this information, it shows that respondents from Akwa-Ibom are of the majority. Section 9 of Table 4.2 shows the Nationality of respondents. 294 respondents (96%) were Nigerians, 10 respondents (3%) were from ECOWAS countries, while 4 respondents (1%) were others. From the above information, it shows that respondents from Nigeria are of majority. Section 10 of Table 4.2 shows the purpose of the visit. 198 respondents (64%) came for Appreciation of nature/ leisure, 21 respondents (7%) came for Educational excursion, while 89 respondents (29%) came for Group meeting, thus, showing that respondents who came for Appreciation of nature/Leisure are of majority.

Section 11 of Table 4.2 shows the frequency of visit. 139 respondents (45%) were first-time visitors, while 169 respondents (55%) were repeat-visitors. From this information, it shows that majority of the respondents were repeat visitors. Section 12 of Table 4.2 shows the travel party. 62 respondents (20%) travelled alone, 91 respondents (30%) travelled with

family/partner, and 108 respondents (35%) travelled with friends / relatives, while 47 respondents (15%) travelled with organized groups. From this information, it shows that majority of the respondents traveled with friends/relatives.  Section 13 of Table 4.2 shows the Monthly Income of Visitors. 55 respondents (18%) earn less than ₦100,000, 163 respondents (53%) earn ₦101,000 – ₦200,000, while 90 respondents (29%) earn above ₦200,000. Thus, majority of respondents earn ₦101,000 to ₦200,000 monthly.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics on items of destination branding capability

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Differentiation based on the authentic culture and attitude of host community | 308 | 2.7662 | 1.46531 |
| Differentiation based on enchanting natural beauty and features of the beach | 308 | 3.8149 | 1.20321 |
| Differentiation based on the beach experience generated by service provision | 308 | 2.3571 | 1.45812 |
| Differentiation based on the Image of peace and safety of the place | 308 | 3.0584 | 1.49369 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 308 | | |

Information on table 1 above indicates the statistical result of destination branding capability of beach managers in Akwa State through the application of descriptive statistics with statistical package for social science (SPSS). The mean scores of the four items of brand destination capability are less than 4, thus, an indication that respondents generally disagreed on two items of destination branding capability. The grand mean of 3.9 > 3.0 is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale.  This result implies the beaches' distinctiveness were their natural features such as enchanting boundless natural coastline, sea waves and breeze that make them feel close to nature and reputation as popular tourist sites in Akwa Ibom State and their impression of the destinations as safe and peaceful places to visit. The non-agreement of the respondents with two of the items suggest

that the beaches were not projected to the tourists/visitors on the bases of beach experience, authentic culture and attitude of the host community.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics on Patronage

| Variables | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TS | 308 | 1.55 | 5.00 | 2.7649 | .83025 |
| RI | 308 | 1.67 | 5.00 | 3.5487 | .68499 |

Table 2 shows the patronage of the beaches in terms of overall tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. As the table indicates, the mean score on tourist satisfaction (2.7649) is less than 3; an indication that respondents generally agreed that the beaches delivered low satisfaction while the mean score of revisit intention (3.5487)  was more than 3.0, suggesting revisit intention by the respondents.

The grand mean of 3.9 > 3.0 is the required mean of a five-point Likert scale.  The above information, therefore suggests poor marketing performance in terms of overall tourists' satisfaction with the destination offers.

**Test of Hypothesis:**
Regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of the independent variable (destination branding capability ) in explaining tourism patronage. In other words, the test was conducted to determine the effect branding capability on the patronage of the beach destinations in terms of tourists'/visitors' satisfaction and revisit intention.

Table 3  Model Summary in Predicting Tourism Patronage
(Model Summary)

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .896ᵃ | .802. | .798 | .44104 |

a. Predictor: (Constant), DBC

Table 3 shows that R is .896,  which means that the independent variables are 89.6% correlated with the dependent variable.  R square is .802;this implies that the independent variable will explain 80.2% of the dependent

variable while the adjusted R square is .798. Simply put, the model summary is an indication that 80.2% of the variance in tourist satisfaction can be explained by the changes in independent variables of destination marketing capabilities. The R square statistic in the model is a measure used to measure the extent to which the total variation in the dependent variable is explained by the regression ( Onudugo, Ugwuonah& Ebinne, 2010).

Table 4. ANOVAa

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 99.304 | 7 | 14.186 | 31.902 | .000b |
| | Residual | 132.962 | 299 | .445 | | |
| | Total | 232.265 | 306 | | | |

Table 4 shows that f-value is 31.902, which is greater than the mean square value (14.186), and the p-value is .000. As a general rule, this model is considered as a 'good fit' as it can explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: tourism patronage (Moosa& Hassan, 2015).What this means is that the regression model has made a significant fit with the data.

Table 5   Regression Analysis for Hypotheses Findings for the Model

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.437 | .517 | | 2.782 | .006 |
| | DBC | ..034 | .045 | .039 | 0.761 | .447 |

a.        Dependent variable: Tourism Patronage
b.        b.Predictor: (Constant), DBC,

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c.        Dependent variable: Tourism Patronage
d.        b.Predictor: (Constant), DBC,

Table 5 shows the result of the regression analysis.  It indicates that destination branding capability (DBC) did not make significant contributions in explaining the dependent variable ( tourist satisfaction), even though the influence was positive beta value (β = .039, p=.447 > 0.05. Thus, the equation is derived:
As gleaned from their Beta and p-values; a determinant of the significance of the effects of the independent variables on the dependent values; the model suggests that the low patronage of the beaches in terms of low tourist satisfaction and revisit intention is a function of the degree of contribution of the destination branding capability. Thus, the model implies that positive changes in branding strategies, for example, at the destination can have a significant influence on the level of tourism patronage in terms of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention.

Table 6: Explanatory Powers of Destination Branding on Tourism Patronage

| Predictor Variables | Criterion Variable | Predictive Power β (Beta value) | P-Value | Level of Sig. | Significance of Effect of DMConTP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DBC | MP | .039 | .447 | p=.447 > 0.05 | Insignificant |

**Effect of Destination Branding capability on Tourism Patronage:**
:**Ho1**:  Destination branding capability does not have a significant effect on the patronage of tourist beaches in Akwa-Ibom State.

**HA1**:  Destination branding capability does have a positive and significant effect on the patronage of tourist  beaches Akwa-Ibom State..

As table 6  reveals, destination branding capability (DBC) beta value   (β)is .039; this means that destination branding capability explains or predicts 3.9% of tourism patronage.

The P-value is .447 > 0.05,which shows an insignificant effect of destination branding on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention to the beaches. By this result, the null hypothesis was accepted, which states that destination branding capability does not have a significant effect on the patronage of the beaches, irrespective of the positive association between the two variables. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (HA2) was rejected.

## DISCUSSION:

## Effect of Destination Branding Capability and Marketing Performance:

The study revealed a positive but insignificant effect of destination branding capability on the patronage of beach destinations in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. In specific terms, destination branding capability has a positive but negligible effect on the patronage of the beach attraction sites in Akwa Ibom State in terms of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention ($\beta$=.039, P-value=.447 > 0.05). The above result is inconsistent with several studies which had established a positive and significant relationship between destination branding and marketing performance in the context of tourism (Singh 2018; Pereira, et al 2018; Ezeuduji et al. 2016; Worlu et al. 2015; Methuie 2015; Boit & Doh 2014; Sreilla &Duryoni 2014; Qu et al. 2011; Abdul et al. 2011, Ibrahim & Gill 2011; Kim & Kim 2005). However, the positive, but insignificant influence of destination branding capability on patronage in the context of beach destinations in Akwa Ibom State may be due to the absence of significant differentiation features (such as facilities )  and experiential service provision which were common to all the beaches. This, implies that most of the beach visitors in the state were attracted by the primary product (the enchanting blue ocean view and beautiful coastline) and image of peace and safety of the destinations. Hence, beach visitation in Akwa-Ibom is not necessarily based on the branding capability of the beach destination managers.

Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2003) among other issues argued that destination branding serves as an identifier and differentiator of a destination, and conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is particular to the destination to create a unique destination image capable of influencing tourists decision to visit the destination. The satisfactory mean scores of 3.8149,  3.0571on two of the branding items suggest that tourists' perception of the uniqueness of the beach attractions in Akwa-Ibom State was their enchanting boundless natural coastline and natural beauty and image of peace and safety.

The managerial implication calls for a tourism development agency in the State to craft a unique destination branding strategy for the beaches based on experiential value (what the natural features of the beaches and beach services/facilities will do for the tourists). The intangible elements are also capable of influencing beach choice behavior and satisfaction of its target markets.  The statement above explains why Morrison and Anderson (2002) describe destination branding capability as a destination's ability to communicate a unique destination's identity by differentiating it from competing destinations. When a unique identity is created for a beach, depending on its peculiarity such as natural features, anticipated memorable experience, authentic culture of the host community; safety and security communicated to target market, then a unique destination image is created in the mind of visitors. Consequently, tourism patronage is possible, which affects beach tourism patronage in terms of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, especially when tourists' expectations are met or exceeded. Conversely, absence of a clear-cut destination branding strategy or

deficiency in destination branding capability negatively affects destination choice and by extension, destination patronage. It is for this reason that destination branding capability can be a significant explanatory variable of beach tourism patronage.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the beach destination operators in Akwa-Ibom State lacked destination branding capability to effectively differentiate their offers. Consequently, it did make not a significant influence on the beaches' patronage, even though the interaction between the two variables (destination branding capability and patronage) was positive. Thus, Destination branding capability had a positive but insignificant effect on the patronage of beach tourism in Akwa-Ibom State. Thus, suggesting that even though the beach destinations lacked experiential value differentiation, it did not affect tourist satisfaction and revisit intention greatly. This may be due to the absence a better alternative or the expectation for service improvement in the future, for example, most beach visitors in Akwa-Ibom and nearby states look forward to having fun at the Ibeno beach annual Christmas party irrespective of the branding deficiencies of the beach management.

The preceding suggests that Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Culture and Tourism has not created a separate and unique branding theme around tourist experience for the beaches apart from their natural physical features. Destination branding is a deliberate attempt to create a unique destination image or personality capable of appealing to tourists as well as differentiating the destination from competing for a destination beyond the tangibles.

The findings also hold certain implications for the government, beach management and destination stakeholders on the need for collaboration. To this end, a good destination marketing company should be consulted by the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Culture and Tourism and destination operators to design an effective branding strategy for the beach destinations based on what the physical features of the beaches can do for tourists/visitors (differentiation by experiential value). In addition, the state government should choose beach tourism to provide a basis for strong branding. Beach design concept and pictorial images should be created for all the four beaches reflecting their uniqueness. Ibeno beach, for example, may be positioned as a weekend get-away destination of pleasure, quality and safety for sun, sand and sea visitors. Furthermore, adequate funding should be provided for the beach tourism branding campaign. In the same vein, destination stakeholders should also realize that destination branding would be a mirage if brand eroders such as visitors' safety/security risks (kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes, poor hygiene culture are not addressed. Therefore, efforts should be made to address the problem that may have given rise to any negative image before branding the destinations.

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