
SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF EVENT CENTRES IN ILORIN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to identify available event centres in Ilorin metropolis, ascertain the type of activities hosted in these event centres, to determine the socio-economic importance of event centres as and to document challenges facing the operations of event centres in the study area. Primary data was collected through personal observation and structured questionnaire. The study found that common events hosted in event centres in Ilorin metropolis include wedding ceremonies, celebrations, burial receptions, and meetings. The study revealed that event centres contribute to socio-economic development of Ilorin metropolis by generating income and creating markets for local products, attracting investment and providing a source of foreign exchange. The challenges facing operations of event centres are poor policy implementation, lack of branding, dearth of qualified manpower, lack of government support and lack of adequate funding. The study concludes that event centres have significant economic impact on host communities; and recommends that government at all level should venture into event centre business to be able to provide service for less privilege citizens who might not have the fund required by the most private event centers.

Keywords: Events, event centres, event tourism, socio-economic importance

INTRODUCTION

Event are public assemblies organized to celebrate, socialize, entertain or engage with one another, and derive economic, social and psychological benefits. Events have become regular features of daily life. They are so prevalent and pervasive, a day hardly passes with an event of one sort or another being seen or heard of. The rise in the frequency of events has led to a corresponding increase in the number of event centres in urban and semi-urban areas of developed and developing countries. Indeed, event centers have become common-placed in most industrialized countries.

Event centers are public assembly facilities that attract people of all ages, social backgrounds and interests (Anderson and Solberg, 1999). They are hubs for cultural and social activities, attract an unpredictable population, thus these centers are designed to allow participants and audience to engage in distinct ways (Boo, 2011). Event centres are facilities that host varieties of events which change with what society wants. (Bojanic and Warnick, 2012). In this context, event centers could be seen as facilities constructed mainly to attract people and accommodate them for events celebrations.

The ubiquity of events and development of event centers has created an industry that call for skilling in core areas of events planning and management; and has informed the formation of key players, such as practitioners, suppliers and professionals into associations. The industry is affected by rapid globalization of markets and communication. Another factor that has affected the events industry is increasing governmental regulation and policies that has rendered industry operating complex and demanding (Harris & McDonnell, 2011).

Critical analysis shows that the events industry intertwines with the tourism industry; as one easily affects the other, and impacts individuals, communities and countries. Within the growth directions of the tourism industry, events act as catalysts for attracting visitors and image-makers, creating destination profiles, positioning destinations, providing competitive advantages and indeed, economic benefit (Bowdin et al., 2006).

Event centers play significant roles in socio-economic development of societies; but their operations are also challenged by sundry factors that affect their operations, including unfavourable government policies, insecurity and exorbitant taxes. The prominence of events and events centres created event tourism as new subject of discourse to formalize the link between events and tourism (Bliss, 2008). The systematic planning, development and marketing of events as tourist attractions serves as a catalysts for economic developments (Getz, 1997).

Event tourism targets individuals who travel to attend events or who can be motivated to attend events while away from home. Ritchie (2004) describe events as “major onetime or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination.” Tourism in the past is majorly about accommodation and hospitality, transportation and entertainment with visitor attractions, such as theme parks, amusement parks, sports facilities, museums and so on, taking the center stage. This focus diverted attention of everyone to those areas until event managers realized that there is an area that was yet to be tapped and this realization gave birth to the event tourism industry (Baker, 2000).

Despite the growing number of event centres in many parts of Nigeria particularly Ilorin metropolis, scholarly works on events tourism remain low. Studies from other parts of the world portray that event tourism contribute meaningfully to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and creates substantial employment (Babatola & Ojetula, 2014).

Aina (2021) studied the socio-economic impacts of event centers on the wellbeing of host community in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The study shows that various events centers have significant impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of their host community. The study sees event centers as means of creating more employment opportunity for the society as it has become a global and national activity in the current century. Also, Olatunji (2020) analyze the growth of event centers in Lagos state and reported that the impression that the differences in the centers' competitiveness and their respective ages reflect their locus in the innovation adoption curve is statistically significant.

This short supply of research on the socio-economic importance of event centers in this part of the country is the motivation for this study. Consequently, the study elects to explore the extent to events and events centres contribute to socio-economic development Ilorin metropolis. The study seeks to ascertain the types of activities hosted in event centers, determine the socio-economic importance of centers as well as document the challenges facing the operations of event centers.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory research design. The population of the study consists Staff of event centers, members of Kwara State Tourism Board and residents of Ilorin metropolis. A total of 120 respondents were selected as sample frame. Primary data was collected using observation and structured questionnaire. Personal observation was used to acquaint the researcher available event centers in Ilorin metropolis. A structured questionnaire of closed-ended format, Likert Scale, with Weighted-Average of 5 was used as an instrument to collect data from respondents in line with the objectives of the study. Multistage sampling technique was used. These involved the combination of techniques. Accidental sampling was used to pick 100 residents because they are the largest in the composition of the population. 10 event centres based on the availability of facility and patronage and one staff each was also picked from the selected event centers while 10 staff of Kwara State Tourism Board were randomly selected. Data gathered were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics which include; frequency, percentage and mean coefficients.

RESULTS

Table 1: Types of Activities Hosted in the Event Centres

Variables	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	Remark
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Weddings	86	77.5	17	15.3	5	4.5	2	1.8	1	0.9	4.66	Significant
Conferences	53	47.7	39	35.1	16	14.4	1	12.6	2	1.8	3.96	Significant
Birthday Celebrations	68	61.3	32	28.8	7	6.3	2	1.8	2	1.8	4.46	Significant
Burial Receptions	35	31.5	59	53.2	9	8.1	5	4.5	3	2.7	4.10	Significant
Meetings	52	46.8	40	36.0	13	11.7	1	12.6	5	4.5	3.85	Significant
Clubbing	41	36.9	44	39.6	23	20.7	2	1.8	1	0.9	4.09	Significant

Note: from the mean, 3+1 is significant, while 3-1 is insignificant result

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 showed the perceived types of activities hosted in the event centers, in which wedding and birthday recorded the highest mean coefficient of 4.66 and 4.46, followed by burial reception with a mean of 4.10 while meeting recorded the least events with a mean of 3.85. This indicates all the variables highlighted as activities hosted in the event centers were practiced in high capacity and thus making the event centers functional and relevant in the community. This further depicts that the event centers were avenues for convenient social interactions and an appealing atmosphere for accommodating several events and activities that were basically economic driven.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Importance of the Event Centers in the Study Area

Variable	Major contribution		Moderate contribution		Neutral		Minor contribution		No contribution		Mean	Remark
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Source of income	87	78.4	14	12.6	5	4.5	3	2.7	2	1.8	4.63	Significant
Revenue generation	41	36.9	57	51.4	8	7.2	4	3.6	1	0.9	4.10	Significant
Event centre has attracted more investment	45	40.5	50	45.0	13	11.7	1	0.9	2	1.8	4.22	Significant
Source of foreign exchange	34	30.6	48	43.2	11	9.9	14	12.6	4	3.6	3.85	Significant
Increment in price of food	44	39.6	46	41.4	17	15.3	2	1.8	2	1.8	4.15	Significant
Job opportunity	49	44.1	46	41.4	10	9.0	3	2.7	3	2.7	4.21	Significant
Creation of new markets for the local products	43	38.7	56	50.5	9	8.1	2	1.8	1	0.9	4.24	Significant
Infrastructural Development	32	28.8	53	47.7	19	17.1	2	1.8	5	4.5	3.95	Significant

Note: from the mean, 3+1 is significant result, while 3-1 is not significant result

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 2 revealed the socio-economic importance of these event centers to the host community, it was deduced from the research findings that source of income and creation of new markets for the local products recorded the highest mean coefficient of 4.63 and 4.24 respectively, followed by event centers has attracted more investment with a mean coefficient of 4.22 while source of foreign exchange was the least with a mean coefficient of 3.85 which is equally significant. This signifies that the event centers have been contributing immensely to the socio-economic development of the study area and as such were important facilities for enhancing economic growth in Ilorin. This study is in conformity with the findings of Aina (2021) who reported that event centers have socio-economic impacts on the wellbeing of host community in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Table 3: Challenges Facing the Operations of the Event Centre

Variable	EC		C		N		NC		CNC		Mean	Remark
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Inadequate knowledge and awareness of the existence of the event centers	45	40.5	17	15.3	13	11.7	20	18.0	16	14.4	3.40	Significant
Inadequate funding	25	22.5	23	20.7	31	27.9	22	19.8	10	9.0	3.27	Significant
Lack of government support	34	30.6	26	23.4	18	16.2	23	20.7	10	9.0	3.46	Significant
Lack of technical know-how and weak promotional activity	22	19.8	34	30.6	29	26.1	22	19.8	4	3.6	3.42	Significant
Dearth of qualified and trained manpower	35	31.5	26	23.4	27	24.3	18	16.2	5	4.5	3.61	Significant
Lack of branding	48	43.2	31	27.9	18	16.2	7	6.3	7	6.3	3.95	Significant
Poor policy implementation	50	45.0	27	24.3	15	13.5	19	17.1	-	-	3.97	Significant
Corruption	28	25.2	34	30.6	13	11.7	31	27.9	5	4.5	3.44	Significant

Note: from the mean, 3+1 is significant result, while 3-1 is not significant result

EC = Extremely Challenging; C = Challenging; N= Neutral; NC = Not Challenging CNC = Completely not Challenging
Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3 revealed the challenges facing the operations of the event centers, policy implementation and lack of branding are the major challenges confronting operations of the event centers with a mean coefficient of 3.97 and 3.95 respectively, followed by dearth of qualified and trained personnel and lack of government support with a mean coefficient of 3.61 and 3.46 while inadequate funding recorded the least mean coefficient of 3.27. These suggest that the event centers, despite their significance in promoting and enhancing socio-economic activities and in turn, social and economic benefits to the host community were still facing numerous challenges, which if curtailed, will pave way for the actual realization of the socioeconomic benefits in greater magnitude. This agrees with the findings of Kruger (2006) that event centers in South Africa are going through a lot of challenges.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has clearly shown that event centers contributed immensely to the socio-economic development of the study area through provision of income, job opportunity, more investment and so on and the major activities hosted in the event centers were wedding and birthday ceremonies while poor policy implementation, lack of branding among others were the major challenges confronting the operation of the event centers.

Consequently, the study recommends that government at all levels and private individuals should venture more into event center business so as to be able to provide services and encourage adequate funding of the operation of event centers; that event centers management should imbibe the spirit of implementing favourable government policies with the view of promoting and enhancing their operations; and that event centers should encourage promoting their business through awareness creation and absolute branding to attract more patronage and hence, socioeconomic dividends.

The study also recommends that every management of the various event centers should be aware of their corporate social responsibility to their host community in order to act accordingly as this will strengthen their relationship with the host community, create more awareness on their existence and significance and thus be considered for any public engagements; and that more event centers should be established by both individuals and government in various parts of Kwara State to facilitate even distribution of economic and social benefits to other communities.

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