



TOURIST MOTIVATION AND INFORMATION SEARCH: SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM SOGNAAYILLI ECOVILLAGE PROJECT IN TAMALE, GHANA

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Abstract

This study delves into the motivations prompting tourists to visit the Sognaayilli Ecovillage and investigate their information search behaviour. Its primary objective is to comprehend the factors that attract tourists to ecovillages and their information-gathering processes preceding travel decisions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered through surveys and interviews with Sognaayilli Ecovillage visitors, and hypothesis testing employed a non-parametric Friedman's test. The investigation probed whether visitors of differing ages, nationalities, and group compositions exhibited distinct motives for visiting the ecovillage. The findings indicated that the ecovillage's potential for learning, encompassing cultural immersion and the pursuit of unique experiences, served as the primary motivators for tourists. Moreover, the study demonstrated that individuals of various nationalities harboured distinct motives, and varying age groups and genders could be swayed by diverse factors when visiting Ghana. These insights hold meaningful implications for ecotourism marketing strategies and the advancement of sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: Ecovillage, motivation, information search, indigenous knowledge, Ghana.

Introduction

An ecovillage is a consciously designed traditional community through a participatory process to regenerate its social and natural environment. The word ecovillage was really born during the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), because of the Brundtland Report of the World Committee on the Environment in

1987 which acknowledge global warming, water scarcity, the threat to living species and growing global poverty, the 278 country leaders met in Rio to discuss the planet's future. Ecovillages were largely neglected and considered as nothing more than just some kinds of social experiments but now they are taking the lead in the reduction of

human footprint being an example to the mainstream society while showing alternative ways of organizing the practical life without exhausting nature. Since then, there have been many ecovillages around the globe which include; Aldinga Arts Ecovillage in Australia, Ahimsa Ecovillage in the United States, Konohana Family in Japan, Antonia Village in the United Kingdom, Auroville in India, Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood in New Zealand, Los Visionaries Ecovillage in Ecuador and Chiva in Spain. In Africa, there is Penyon Bay Ecovillage in Morocco, Khula Dhamma Ecovillage in South Africa, and Odi Ecovillage in Nigeria. Also in Ghana is the Mognori Ecovillage in Mole, Xofa Ecovillage at Lake Volta of the Volta Region, and Sognaayilli Ecovillage in the Northern Region.

The Sognaayilli Ecovillage offers a traditional Dagomba village setting and is approximately 10 km away from Tamale. It has been receiving tourists since November 2004 and feedback evaluation forms show that the tourists are always very enthusiastic about the village. In the Ecovillage, visitors are able to enjoy the rural scenery and the traditional village compound architecture and experience local culture. Besides this, visitors stay in a private hut with an indigenous family which makes the experience more realistic. As the spread of information increases and expands at a faster rate, social media become an essential part of everyday life. Nowadays, when travelers search for their lodging and travel information for their upcoming trips, they tend to rely more on sources such as the internet, word of mouth (WOM), electronic word of mouth (eWOM), visiting friends and family (VFR), and others than before. Most rely on all the above sources of information before undertaking a

trip and also consider the risks attached to each of these sources. One reason for people searching travel information online is that it is easier and faster to get updated information. Therefore, it is crucial for industry professionals to understand the criteria customers use to assess the veracity of information and make their final decision in order to better serve their requirements in this dynamic.

Literature Review

Tourist Motivation

Tourist motivation is the driving force behind human behavior, fueling the pursuit of goals and a fundamental aspect of decision-making (Simpson & Balsam, 2015). Accordingly, individuals seek to release this tension and fulfill these needs. Beltrán-Bueno and Parra-Meroño (2017) defined tourist motivation as the psychological and sociopsychological factors that sway people's decisions to select and partake in certain tourist activities. In addition, O'Leary and Deegan (2005) considered motivation as the combination of needs and desires that influence the inclination towards travel. Thus, motivation is in fact a crucial component of models used to choose tourism destination and create positive perception of them. Nevertheless, the application of motivation theory in the context of tourism marketing is key and involves designing and marketing products that provide solutions to the needs of consumers. The theory of motivation aims to describe the processes that explain why and how human behaviour is initiated and controlled. While other factors may also influence tourist behaviour, motivation is still considered a key indicator that explains why tourists behave in certain ways. Additionally, the effectiveness of the visual and emotional

stimuli produced by a location or its inhabitants is also subject to the motivational state of the viewer. Thus, it is essential to understand the various factors that can affect an individual's perception and evaluation of a destination, including their travel motivations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Past studies have suggested that people's motivation to travel is driven by the desire to escape their everyday environment (Yousaf et al., 2018; Amara, 2018; Kaulbars, 2009). They seek out recreational opportunities that allow them to break away from routine activities and engage in new experiences, such as meeting new people and visiting new places. In fact, motivation is closely intertwined with imagery and emotions. This quest is referred to as the push-factor which is theorized as the push-pull theory of travel motivation. This theory facilitates individuals' comprehension of the factors that motivate tourists to travel and how these factors influence their choices of travel destinations.

Generally, the push factors are the intrinsic internal motives that cause people (tourists) to travel or desire adventure, social interaction or escape. In essence, push factors represent the inherent desire to leave one's current location and be elsewhere, without specifying the destination, by propelling a tourist away from home (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004). According to Pearce and Lee's (2005) research, the dominant push factors driving travel include escape, relaxation, relationship enhancement, and self-development. Similarly, the earlier research by Dann (1977) classified the push factors into two main categories, anomie and ego-enhancement tourists. Anomie is the desire to overcome the sense of isolation inherent in everyday life, while ego enhancement relates to the need for recognition through the status conferred by

travel. Martin and Woodside (2008) later characterized anomic tourists as primarily young, married men from small towns and rural regions with an above-average socioeconomic level, while ego-enhancement tourists are more likely to be female, first-time visitors, from lower socioeconomic strata, and older than anomic tourists. In contrast, the pull factors are the external attributes unique to the destination or related to the attractiveness of the destination (Mohammad & Som, 2010; Said & Maryono, 2018). For instance, the specific attributes of a cultural destination, such as a relaxed atmosphere, cultural events, and friendliness of the local people, are essential pull factors that entice and attract tourists. A comprehensive understanding of these factors is vital to comprehending the motivation behind travel since it is a valuable key in the tourism industry and its significance cannot be overstated (Jang & Cai, 2002).

Tourist Information Search

The efficacy of destination marketing communication campaigns is contingent on the extent to which destination marketing managers are conversant with travellers' information search behaviour. Gursoy and McCleary (2004) posits that understanding this behaviour is critical since the information search phase represents the primary stage in which marketing can provide information and influence vacation decisions. Fodness and Murray (1998) conceptualize information search as a dynamic process, characterized by the use of various amounts and types of information sources in response to internal and external contingencies to facilitate travel planning. However, past experiences may render pre-visit information search unnecessary.

Goossens (2000) argues that a combination of push and pull information and hedonic responses motivate tourists to plan a trip. This involves daydreams, imagining, and emotions. Forethought is a critical factor in guiding anticipatory behaviour. By symbolising foreseeable outcomes, individuals can convert future consequences into current motivators and regulators of foresightful behaviour. Consumption visions enable consumers to visualize the consumption attributes before making a purchase. Through this process, consumers can evaluate different product alternatives to choose the option that generates the highest satisfaction and pleasure through consumption (Goossens, 2000). Gursoy and McCleary (2004) posit that travellers' prior product knowledge has two components: familiarity and expertise. Low familiarity with a destination stimulates reliance on external information sources, while increased familiarity results in a dependence on memory to make vacation decisions. With increased expertise, however, travellers realize that they need more detailed information to make informed vacation decisions, leading to additional external information searches. Grønflaten (2009) introduces several personal characteristics that influence the choice of search strategy, including age, gender, socio-economic status, education, nationality, and personal values. However, the influence of these characteristics has produced contradictory results. The research distinguishes between information sources and channels. Information sources refer to providers of information, including travel agents and primary service providers. Information channels, on the other hand, encompass communication methods, such as face-to-face communication or the Internet

(Grønflaten, 2009). Sognaayilli Ecovillage offers an opportunity to experience traditional life in a rural village. The Ecovillage comprises two significant aspects, the voluntary and the tourism/holiday aspect. It offers several activities that are of interest to visitors and also serve as livelihood enhancement opportunities for the host community including;

Traditional religion

Religion continues to play a major role in the daily lives of Ghanaians. The Sognaayilli community, in particular, holds three shrines in high regard for their perceived ability to provide solutions to both individual and community-wide challenges. These shrines are believed to offer relief from common issues such as drought and infertility. A visit to these holy places provides tourists with a glimpse into the overall ambience of the town. Before commencing the visit, tourists must first seek permission from the chief of Sognaayilli. Additionally, they may choose to consult the soothsayer to ask specific questions and receive advice.

Kuli-kuli Making

Kuli-kuli, a snack that is prevalent in the Northern Region, are rings made of peanuts and water. These crunchy treats are typically consumed alongside tea or porridge. To support female entrepreneurs operating in this sector, the ecovillage provides an opportunity for tourists to witness the kuli-kuli-making process and even create their own. This initiative not only promotes the local economy but also fosters cross-cultural exchange.

Baby Washing and Massage

In many cultural contexts, it is customary for a midwife or the grandmother of a newborn to engage in daily washing and massaging of

the infant. This ritual, which has been passed down through generations, is believed to have a calming effect on the infant while also promoting their strength and overall health. This bathing custom typically continues until the infant is three months old, and is conducted in a specialized manner. Though the ritual is an aesthetically pleasing tradition to observe, it is also possible for tourists to partake in the practice, provided they are comfortable holding the infant. By doing so, visitors may gain a firsthand experience of the custom.

Several sources of information search are open to the potential traveler. Considering Sognaayilli Ecovillage, the exact source of information which tourists use to know and visit the destinations as well as the motivation is not well established till date, as no studies have been conducted. The rich indigenous culture provided by the Ecovillage is central to maintaining the livelihoods of people especially women in the community who are involved in traditional souvenir making. Understanding the push-pull factors would enable the sustainability of the Ecovillage and enhance livelihood of community members as more tourists would directly enhance livelihood. Hence, this study aims to analyze and assess the motivation that push-pull tourists to the Sognaayilli Ecovillage.

The study also aims to identify the sources of information for tourists visiting the destination and how these information sources influence their decision to travel. By exploring various sources of information, the study addresses the key question of “where destination management must focus to maximum tourists’ attraction”.

Research Methodology

Study Area

The present study was conducted at the Sognaayilli Ecovillage, situated in the Sagnarigu District of the Northern Region of Ghana within the Savannah woodland.

Sampling Techniques and Data Collection Tool

Using a mixed-method approach, data was gathered through survey and interviews at the Sognaayilli Ecovillage. A survey of tourists was carried out for the empirical development of this study at the Sognaayilli Ecovillage over a six-month period, utilizing ad hoc questionnaires that were reviewed and submitted to a pilot test. Valid data from 50 tourists were obtained through accidental sampling, necessitated by the low patronage of tourists at the destination. The survey questions were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale and encompassed inquiries into the tourists’ origins and motivation, as per the framework proposed by Crompton and informed by relevant literature. The collected data underwent analysis using Statistica 13.3. Additionally, non-parametric Friedman's test was used to test hypotheses on different variables and to determine the significance of tourists' motivation.

Hypothesis

To understand how different age groups and other factors may influence the motive for visitation, a null and alternative hypothesis were developed as follows: *Hypothesis 1*: H_0 : Different age groups of visitors, their nationality, and their group composition do have a different motives and feedback on visitation. H_1 : Different age groups of visitors, their nationality, and their group composition do not have a different motive and feedback

on visitation. *Hypothesis 2*: H_0 : Tourist satisfaction is influenced by their nationality, gender, age group and group composition. H_1 : Tourist satisfaction is not influenced by their nationality, gender, age group and group composition.

Results and Discussion

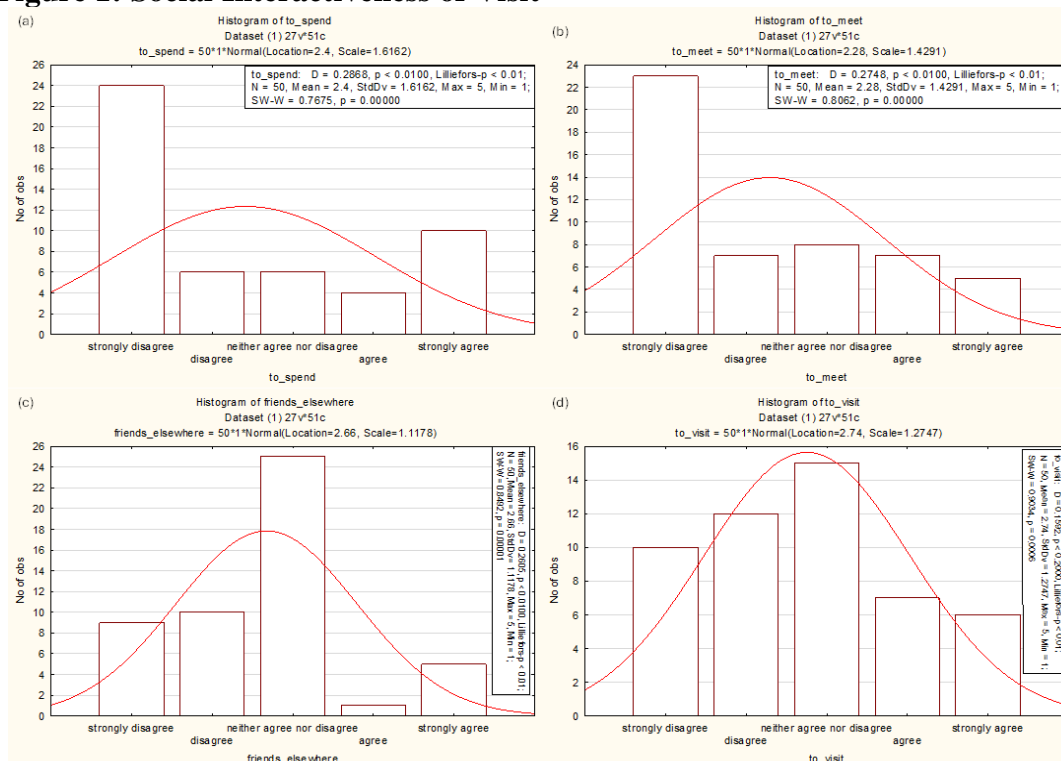
Motivation for visiting

The social interaction category encompasses various elements that include Dann (1977)

anomie, Crompton, (1979) enhancement of kinship relations, and facilitation of social interaction. This category takes into account the following survey items: [I came to Sognaayilli Ecovillage...]

- To spend time with family elsewhere
- To meet new people
- To spend time with friends elsewhere
- To visit a place that my friends have visited before

Figure 1: Social Interactiveness of Visit



Source: Field Survey (2023).

Figure 1a illustrates the results of tourists with the sole motive to visit the Ecovillage in order to spend time with family elsewhere. Based on this, it was found that a majority of the respondents, 46%, strongly disagreed with the notion of spending time with their family outside of their usual place of

residence. Conversely, only 10% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Furthermore, the data revealed that individual volunteers were less inclined to agree with the statement, as illustrated in Figure 1. The aforementioned findings suggest that spending time with family

outside of the home may not be a top priority for a significant proportion of the survey population, especially among individual volunteers. Also, it can be inferred that a significant number of respondents evinced a lack of motivation to visit the Ecovillage in order to meet new people (Figure 1b). Specifically, 48% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, "to meet new people", while an additional 22% merely disagreed with it. Intriguingly, the data further revealed that volunteers who visited the ecovillage with their family members or friends were particularly disinclined to meet new people, as the majority of both groups strongly disagreed with the statement. Conversely, individual visitors demonstrated a greater inclination towards meeting new people, with 10% of the respondents strongly agreeing with the statement. Additionally, the primary motive of the majority of visitors at the Sognaayilli Ecovillage was not to spend time with friends as shown in Figure 1c. Approximately half of the respondents (50%) expressed neither agreement nor disagreement regarding the intention to spend time with friends. In contrast, a mere 2% of respondents agreed to this sentiment. This data suggests that socializing with friends was not a significant factor in the decision-making process for most visitors. As revealed in Figure 1d, the notion of visiting the Ecovillage solely based on the recommendation of friends was not the predominant mindset among respondents. Specifically, 30% of participants expressed strong disagreement with the statement "to visit a place that my friends have visited before." Conversely, 14% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed with the statement. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion, 26%, expressed agreement with the idea of visiting a similar location to where

their friends had visited, in order to gain their own experience.

Escape and Relaxation

The escape and relaxation category encompasses elements of Crompton's (1979) theory of escape from perceived mundane environments, Iso-Ahola's (1982) approach, and Fodness (1994) punishment minimization function. This category consists of survey items that are designed to measure the vacation motives of individuals seeking escape from their routine environment and relaxation. The survey items that fall under this category include [I came to Sognaayilli Ecovillage...]

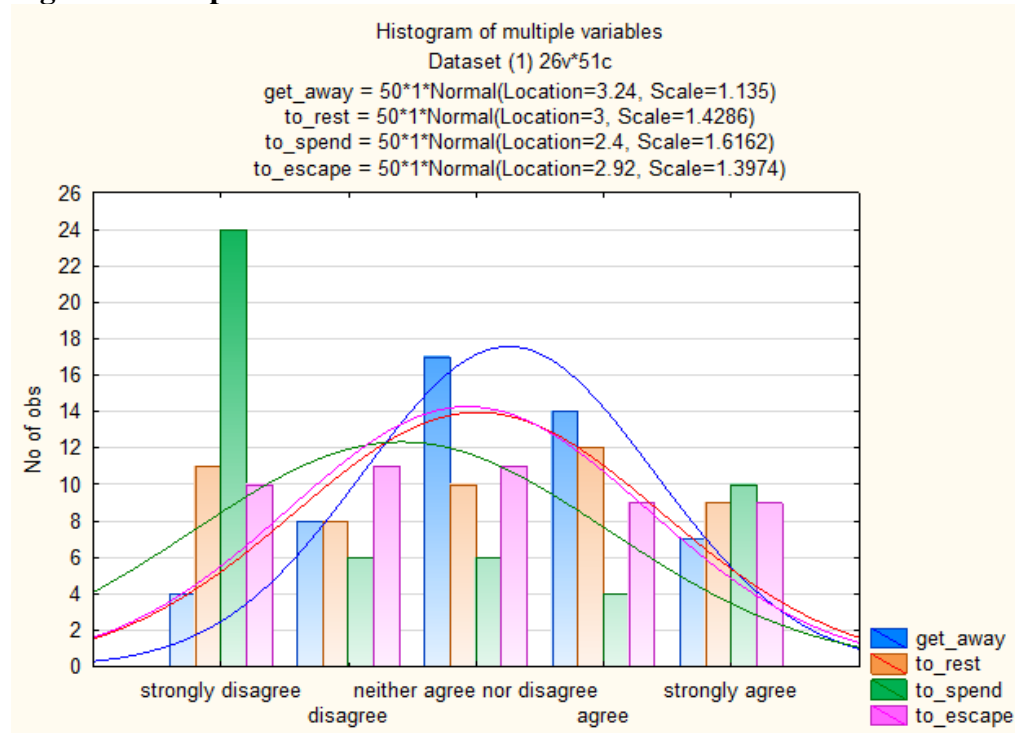
- To get away from everyday activities/routines
- To rest and relax
- To spend time alone doing stocktaking
- To escape from boredom

As shown in Figure 2 below, the responses elicited from the respondents regarding the statement in this category displayed a notable degree of variation. Strongly agreeing to either of the above questions were shown to be highest in terms of tourists spending time alone doing stocktaking. Notwithstanding, the notion of escaping from boredom was found to have received the second highest responses in terms of strongly agreeing to the notion. Nevertheless, a considerable number of respondents also strongly agreed to the other aspects of the questions in this category. However, it is worth noting, however, that the survey did not differentiate between mental and physical relaxation. It is however imperative to understand the implications of these findings. Initial assessment indicates that Sognaayilli Ecovillage has established itself as a destination focused on providing

relaxation. However, further investigation is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the specific nature of the relaxation that visitors are seeking. Moreover, the minimal percentage of respondents expressing disagreement with the aforementioned

statement implies that the Ecovillage's marketing approach effectively attracts individuals in pursuit of relaxation. It is imperative for businesses in hospitality and tourism to understand customer motivations and tailor their offerings accordingly.

Figure 2: Escape and Relaxation



Source: Field Survey (2023).

Learning

The category of learning involves the exploration and evaluation of oneself, novelty, and education. This category consists of a series of survey questions that serve to assess an individual's inclination toward learning and their ability to adapt to new situations and concepts. The construct of self-exploration refers to an individual's self-awareness and their willingness to engage in introspection. Novelty, on the other hand, refers to an individual's openness to new

ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Hence assessing an individual's learning category can provide valuable insights into their personal and professional development needs. The survey question under this category include:

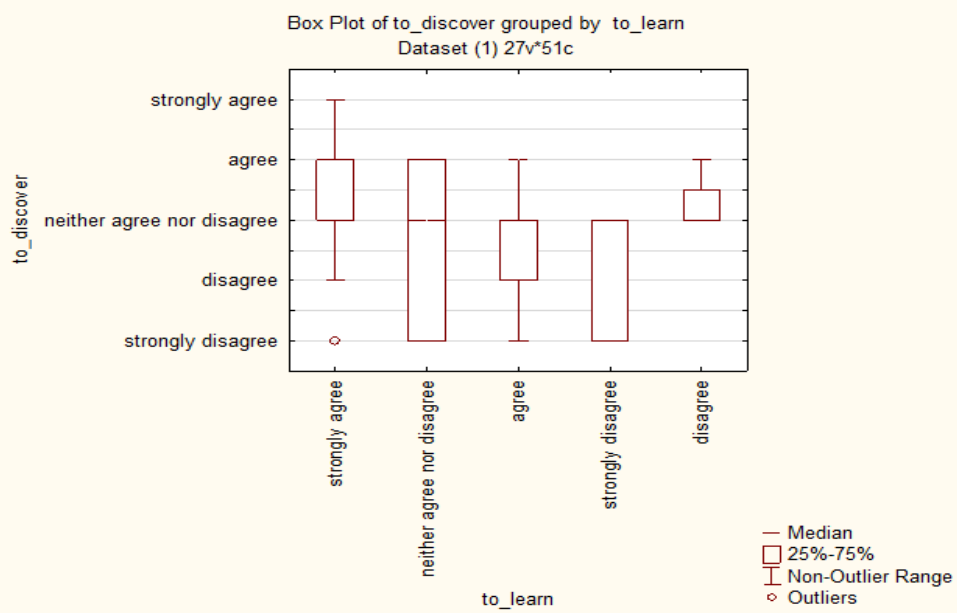
[I came to Sognaayilli Ecovillage...]

- To discover something new about myself
- To learn about the art/culture of different people

The data presented in Figure 3 below indicates that self-discovery was not a prominent factor for the majority of visitors at Sognaayilli Ecovillage. A significant portion of the respondents remained neutral, with 36% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the item. Overall, the findings suggest that self-discovery was not a top priority for most visitors to Sognaayilli Ecovillage, although a notable proportion of participants recognized its value. The potential for learning at Sognaayilli Ecovillage has been highly esteemed by its respondents.

Approximately 42% of the respondents strongly agreed that learning about art and culture was one of their prime motivators for visiting the Sognaayilli Ecovillage. An additional 30% agreed with this statement, while only a small percentage of participants disagreed. Notably, 18% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the item, remaining neutral. These findings suggest that the Sognaayilli Ecovillage has significant potential as a destination for art and culture enthusiasts seeking to broaden their knowledge and experience.

Figure 3: Learning and Discovery



Source: Field Survey (2023).

Information Sources

Approximately 68% of participants indicated that they sought information about the Sognaayilli ecovillage prior to their visit. This highlights the importance of destination management in providing accurate information through diverse communication

channels. Examination of the field survey data unveiled that 22% of respondents engaged tour/travel agents, while 28% relied on travel guides or brochures. Additionally, 18% of respondents utilized the Internet for their travel research, with a particular focus

on Ecovillage's website. The use of the internet as a source of information comes as no surprise, given that it has become a dominant force in tourism marketing communication, as noted by Grønflaten (2009). This highlights the increasing importance of the Internet in tourism marketing and how destination management can leverage their destination website to attract more visitors.

Table 1: Source of Information

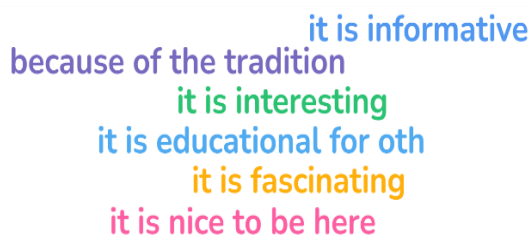
Source	Frequency
Tour/travel agent	11
Travel guide/brochure	14
Website (meetafrica.org)	9

Source: Field Survey (2023).

Decision-marking and General Opinions

The study indicates that none of the respondents had visited the Sognaayilli Ecovillage previously. All respondents (100%) expressed their willingness to recommend the Sognaayilli Ecovillage to others, which suggests that the Ecovillage experience was perceived as satisfactory. The reasons underlying their recommendation have been presented in the table below.

Figure 4: Reason for Recommending Sognaayilli Ecovillage

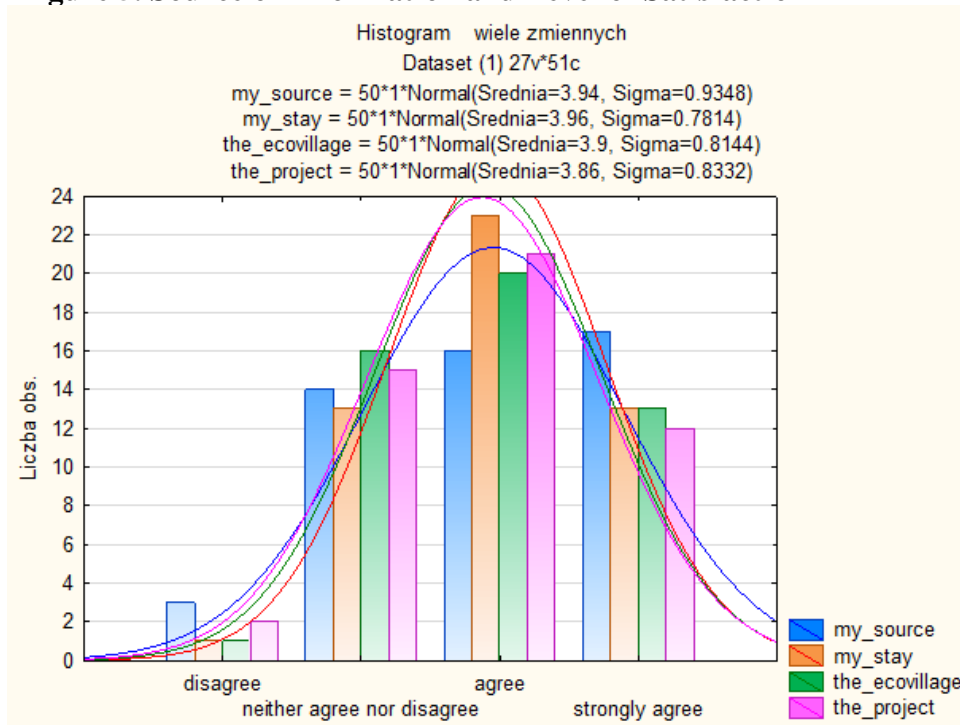


Source: Field Survey (2023).

The analyzed survey data indicates that a majority of the respondents, 56%, agreed that their sources of information search were informative enough. Conversely, the percentage of respondents who disagreed with this statement amounted to only 6%. These findings suggest that the respondents were largely satisfied with their sources of information search and that a minority experienced issues with the quality of information they were accessing. The findings of the survey indicate that the majority of respondents regarded their stay in the ecovillage as a memorable and satisfactory experience, as shown in Figure 5. Interestingly, no respondent expressed strong disagreement with the item. These results suggest that Sognaayilli Ecovillage has been successful in fulfilling its mission of providing a positive and fulfilling stay experience for its visitors. Additionally, the results indicated that the majority of respondents held a positive view of the Ecovillage's staff, regarding them as helpful, informative, and educational. Nevertheless, some respondents remained neutral with this assessment. These findings suggest that while a significant proportion of respondents view the staff positively, there may be room for improvement in terms of communication and education. The survey findings reveal that a majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the ecovillage project is an authentic representation of the indigenous Ghanaian lifestyle. However, a significant proportion (30%) did not express a definitive view on the matter, citing their lack of knowledge about the indigenous way of life. Only a small fraction of the respondents disagreed with the statement, as is evident from Figure 5. It is noteworthy that the ecovillage project has garnered substantial interest and support from the local

community, and its contribution to sustainable development in the region is widely acknowledged.

Figure 5. Source of Information and Level of Satisfaction



Source: Field Survey (2023).

Non-Parametric Friedman's Test

Visitors from different countries have different motives and feedback about their visitation. Here, we assume that their demographics affect their motive to visit and have feedback regarding the dataset. As the sample is having non-parametric distribution, we will apply the non-parametric Friedman test. Friedman's two-way analysis of variance by rank provided the p-value of .000, which indicates the rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that these qualitative factors do have an influence on the motives of the visitors. Different nationalities, age groups, and genders may have different motives for

visiting Ghana. The study also examined whether the visitors' satisfaction with the facilities provided during their visit was influenced by their nationality, gender, age group, and group composition. The results showed that the p-value was more than .05, specifically 0.982, which means that the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that people are unbiased while experiencing the visitation of Ghana village, and no factors of their demographic profile affect their experience. The study concluded that people are unbiased when visiting villages in Ghana.

Conclusion

The focus of the research was on the motivational factors of visitors to the Sognaayilli Ecovillage. These motivational factors were found to influence both individuals and groups in their decision-making process. The study categorized the motivational factors into three groups, namely social interaction, escape and relaxation, and learning. The study results showed that Soynaayilli Ecovillage's learning potential was the most highly rated attribute among respondents. People chose to visit the Ecovillage to explore their interests and learn about the art and culture of different people.

Recommendations

- The study has shown that many tourists rely on travel guides and brochures for information. Therefore, it is important for the ecovillage to increase its visibility in these materials, which are commonly used by foreign visitors. One potential strategy is to have a stronger presence in important locations such as the airport arrival lobby and bookstores. This will help increase awareness among the target audience and attract more visitors to the ecovillage.
- The ecovillage should prioritize its role as a cultural institution, offering a wide range of learning opportunities. Additionally, its marketing efforts should highlight the social aspects of the visit to enhance the overall visitor experience. A heightened focus on the ecovillage's cultural and educational significance will not only attract more visitors, but also consolidate its position as a leading institution in the field of sustainable living.

- The results of our study indicate that a significant proportion of visitors, specifically 81%, come in groups or organized tours. Such findings present an opportunity to offer group discounts as a viable option. This strategy may attract more visitors and enhance customer satisfaction.

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