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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

EFFECTS OF INSECURITY ON TOURISM DESTINATION IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

Insecurity constitutes one of the most debilitating obstacles to tourism development in developing regions. This study examines the effects of insecurity on tourism destinations in Rivers State, Nigeria, a state endowed with rich cultural heritage, diverse natural attractions, and significant ecotourism potential but plagued by persistent security challenges including militancy, oil bunkering, kidnapping, and communal conflicts. The study adopts a descriptive survey research design. Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires administered to 120 respondents comprising tourists, hospitality workers, tour operators, and residents, supplemented by key informant interviews. Secondary data were obtained from published journals, textbooks, government reports, and tourism statistics. Findings reveal that insecurity significantly undermines tourist arrivals, deters foreign direct investment in tourism infrastructure, hampers revenue generation, and diminishes the image of Rivers State as a viable tourism destination. The study further reveals that insecurity has led to massive divestment from the hospitality sector, loss of employment, and underutilisation of tourism resources. The study recommends sustained government intervention in security management, community policing initiatives, investment in tourism infrastructure, and robust destination marketing strategies to restore confidence in Rivers State as a safe and attractive tourism destination. The study concludes that addressing insecurity is a precondition for the development and sustainability of the tourism sector in Rivers State.

Keywords: Insecurity, Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Tourism remains one of the world's fastest-growing industries and a critical driver of economic development, employment generation, and cultural exchange. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has consistently noted that tourism contributes significantly to national gross domestic product (GDP), foreign exchange earnings, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries endowed with natural and cultural resources. In Nigeria, tourism has been recognised as a key non-oil sector capable of diversifying the economy and driving sustainable development, especially in resource-rich states like Rivers State.

Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria, is blessed with an array of tourism resources that position it as a significant tourism destination. The state

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boasts of diverse natural endowments including mangrove forests, creeks, waterways, beaches, and rich wildlife. Cultural attractions abound in the form of traditional festivals such as the Ogoni Cultural Festival, the Opobo Day Regatta, and the colourful masquerades of its numerous ethnic groups. The state also harbours historical landmarks, archaeological sites, and vibrant culinary traditions that could serve as major draw-cards for both domestic and international tourists. The cosmopolitan nature of Port Harcourt, the state capital, further positions Rivers State as a hub for business tourism and meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) tourism.

Despite these significant potentials, the Rivers State tourism sector has remained largely underdeveloped relative to its resource endowments. A major factor responsible for this underperformance is the pervasive state of insecurity that has enveloped the Niger Delta region for decades. The discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta in the late 1950s sparked a complex web of socio-economic grievances, resource control agitations, and armed militancy that fundamentally altered the security landscape of Rivers State. Groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and various splinter factions engaged in pipeline vandalism, hostage-taking, kidnapping for ransom, and armed confrontations with security forces, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

The consequences of this insecurity for tourism have been profound. Prospective tourists, particularly international visitors, have consistently avoided the state due to travel advisories issued by foreign governments warning their citizens against non-essential travel to Rivers State and the broader Niger Delta region. Tourism-dependent businesses have struggled to attract and retain clientele. Foreign investors have diverted capital away from hospitality and tourism infrastructure development in the state. Government revenue from tourism has declined markedly, undermining the state's capacity to develop and maintain tourism assets.

The relationship between security and tourism is well-established in academic literature. Scholars such as Hall, Timothy, and Duval (2003) have extensively documented the sensitivity of tourist behaviour to security conditions at destinations. Tourist demand is highly elastic with respect to security perceptions; even a single high-profile security incident can trigger substantial declines in tourist arrivals that may take years to reverse. This phenomenon, often described as the "image problem" of insecure destinations, compounds the economic losses from tourism underperformance.

More recently, the rise in communal conflicts, cultism, armed robbery, and kidnapping in Rivers State has further exacerbated the security situation. These challenges are not confined to the rural creeks but have increasingly permeated urban centres, including Port Harcourt. The kidnapping of expatriate oil workers and businesspersons, frequently reported in the media, has reinforced the negative image of the state as a dangerous destination. This study therefore investigates the specific effects of insecurity on tourism in Rivers State with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for addressing this critical challenge.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers State possesses enormous tourism potential encapsulated in its natural beauty, cultural diversity, historical heritage, and strategic location. Yet the state's tourism sector consistently underperforms relative to its endowments. Statistics from the Rivers State Tourism Bureau and the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) reveal a persistent decline in tourist arrivals, hotel occupancy rates, and tourism revenue over the past two decades. While multiple factors contribute to this underperformance, insecurity stands out as the most pervasive and debilitating constraint.

Specifically, the following security-related problems have been identified as significant impediments to tourism development in Rivers State: persistent militancy and

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armed group activities in the Niger Delta; frequent incidents of kidnapping targeting both local and international visitors; communal and inter-ethnic conflicts that periodically disrupt activities in tourism areas; armed robbery and violent crime in urban centres including Port Harcourt; and cultism and gang violence that create generalised insecurity across the state.

Despite the recognition of insecurity as a major challenge to tourism development, there is a paucity of systematic empirical research that specifically examines the magnitude and mechanisms of insecurity's effects on tourism destinations in Rivers State. Existing studies tend to treat the issue tangentially as part of broader analyses of Nigeria's tourism challenges or the Niger Delta conflict. A study specifically focused on Rivers State, drawing on primary data from tourism stakeholders, is therefore needed to fill this gap and provide targeted policy insights. This study addresses this lacuna.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effects of insecurity on tourism destinations in Rivers State. The specific objectives are:

To assess the nature and types of insecurity prevalent in Rivers State that affect tourism.

To examine the effects of insecurity on tourist arrivals in Rivers State.

To evaluate the impact of insecurity on tourism infrastructure and investment in Rivers State.

To determine the effect of insecurity on the image and perception of Rivers State as a tourism destination.

To investigate the socio-economic consequences of insecurity on tourism-dependent communities in Rivers State.

To identify strategies for mitigating insecurity and enhancing tourism development in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

What is the nature and prevalence of insecurity challenges affecting tourism destinations in Rivers State?

How has insecurity affected tourist arrivals in Rivers State?

What is the impact of insecurity on tourism infrastructure development and investment in Rivers State?

How has insecurity influenced the image and perception of Rivers State as a tourism destination?

What are the socio-economic consequences of insecurity on tourism-dependent communities in Rivers State?

What strategies can be adopted to mitigate insecurity and promote tourism development in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated and tested in this study:

H01: Insecurity has no significant effect on tourist arrivals in Rivers State.

H02: Insecurity has no significant impact on tourism infrastructure development and investment in Rivers State.

H03: Insecurity has no significant influence on the destination image of Rivers State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between insecurity and the socio-economic wellbeing of tourism-dependent communities in Rivers State.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant on multiple fronts. From a policy perspective, the findings will provide the Rivers State Government, the Rivers State Tourism Bureau, and the Nigeria

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Tourism Development Corporation with empirical evidence on which to base targeted interventions to address insecurity's impact on tourism. The recommendations will assist policy makers in designing security strategies that are responsive to the specific needs of the tourism sector.

For tourism practitioners including hoteliers, tour operators, travel agents, and destination management organisations, the study provides insights into the security perceptions of tourists and the specific security factors that most significantly affect tourism demand. This will enable them to develop effective risk management and destination marketing strategies.

Academically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on the nexus between security and tourism, particularly in the African context. It adds empirical depth to the largely theoretical frameworks that have been applied to this subject and fills the geographical gap in research focused specifically on Rivers State, Nigeria.

The study is also significant for the communities that depend on tourism for their livelihoods. By highlighting the socio-economic consequences of insecurity-induced tourism decline, the study advocates for greater community engagement in security and tourism development, thereby contributing to local empowerment and sustainable development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Concept of Insecurity

Insecurity, in its broadest conceptualisation, denotes a condition or state in which individuals, communities, or systems are exposed to threats, dangers, or risks that undermine their safety, stability, and wellbeing. The concept is inherently multidimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, economic, and political dimensions. From a physical standpoint, insecurity refers to the tangible threats of violence, crime, and armed conflict that endanger human life and property. Psychologically, insecurity manifests as a pervasive sense of fear, anxiety, and vulnerability that affects individual and collective behaviour.

In the Nigerian context, particularly in the Niger Delta, insecurity has assumed distinctive characteristics rooted in the political economy of oil extraction. The region's insecurity is fundamentally linked to the unresolved contradictions of resource control, environmental degradation, youth unemployment, and political marginalisation. Scholars like Ikelegbe (2005) have characterised Niger Delta insecurity as a product of the "politics of resource allocation" in which communities feel dispossessed of their natural resource wealth, fuelling resentment and armed resistance. Rivers State, at the heart of the Niger Delta, has been particularly exposed to these dynamics.

The specific manifestations of insecurity in Rivers State that are relevant to tourism include: armed militancy and group violence; kidnapping for ransom targeting both Nigerians and expatriates; armed robbery; inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts; cultism and gang warfare; oil theft and pipeline vandalism (which has environmental consequences for tourism sites); and generalised lawlessness in certain areas. Each of these security threats has distinct spatial patterns, temporal dynamics, and consequences for tourism, which this study seeks to elucidate.

Concept of Tourism and Tourism Destination

Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019) as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. The tourism system encompasses tourists, destinations, transit routes, and generating regions, all linked by information flows and tourism supply chains.

A tourism destination is a physical space with or without administrative or analytical

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boundaries in which a visitor can spend at least one overnight stay. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, as well as tourism resources, with defined boundaries that constitute the destination's administrative and marketing framework (UNWTO, 2007). Tourism destinations are constituted by clusters of products and experiences that create the overall visitor experience.

Rivers State as a tourism destination encompasses a rich tapestry of natural, cultural, and built attractions. Its natural attractions include the Oguta Lake, the Isaac Boro Park, the Rumuola recreational centre, the Green-White-Green tourist resort, and the diverse mangrove ecosystems and waterways of the Niger Delta. Cultural tourism resources include the vibrant Igbo, Ijaw, Ogoni, and Ikwerre traditional festivals, arts, and crafts. Historical resources include the slave trade routes, colonial-era architecture, and archaeological sites. The hospitality infrastructure of Port Harcourt supports business tourism, including a number of internationally affiliated hotels.

Tourism and Security Nexus

The relationship between security and tourism is characterised by an intrinsic and irreducible interdependence. Safety and security are widely regarded as foundational prerequisites for a functional tourism system. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, frequently applied in tourism research, positions safety as a second-tier need that must be satisfied before higher-order tourism motivations (such as cultural exploration and self-actualisation) can be pursued. This theoretical insight explains why potential tourists systematically avoid destinations perceived as unsafe, regardless of the attractiveness of other tourism attributes.

Pizam and Smith (2000) distinguished between different types of violence that affect tourism: political terrorism, civil unrest, crime against tourists, and war. Each type has distinctive effects on tourist behaviour, with political terrorism and civil unrest typically producing the most severe and persistent impacts on tourist arrivals. In the context of Rivers State, militancy and organised crime approximate these high-impact categories, suggesting that their effects on tourism should be particularly severe.

Hall et al. (2003) observed that the tourism industry's sensitivity to security events is asymmetric: negative security events produce large and immediate declines in tourist demand, while the recovery of tourist demand following the resolution of security problems is gradual and uncertain. This asymmetry creates a ratchet effect in which each security incident leaves a cumulative negative legacy on destination image that progressively erodes the tourism base. Rivers State's protracted experience with insecurity may therefore have produced compounding negative effects that go beyond what any single incident would generate.

Tourism Resources in Rivers State

Rivers State is richly endowed with diverse tourism resources that span natural, cultural, heritage, and business tourism categories. These resources, if properly harnessed in a secure environment, have the potential to establish Rivers State as one of Nigeria's premier tourism destinations.

Natural tourism resources in Rivers State include the extensive network of creeks, rivers, and estuaries of the Niger Delta, which support unique biodiversity including mangrove forests, diverse fish species, and bird life. The Isaac Boro Park in Port Harcourt serves as an urban green space and recreational facility. The beaches along the coastline, particularly Finima Beach on Bonny Island, offer significant potential for beach tourism. The Oguta Lake, shared with Imo State, supports ecotourism and water-based recreational activities.

Cultural resources are equally impressive. The Ogoni people's cultural practices, including the Ogoni Cultural Festival, the traditional New Yam Festival celebrated across

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various communities, the Kalabari water festivals, and the Opobo Day Regatta are major cultural tourism events that attract visitors from across Nigeria and beyond. The rich tradition of Ogoni masks, Kalabari textiles, and Ijaw canoe carving represents significant cultural heritage tourism potential.

Theoretical Framework

Tourist Risk Perception Theory

Tourist Risk Perception Theory, developed through the contributions of scholars such as Sonmez and Graefe (1998) and Sönmez (1998), posits that tourists' travel decisions are fundamentally shaped by their perception of risks at potential destinations. The theory recognises that tourists engage in a cognitive evaluation process in which the perceived benefits of visiting a destination are weighed against the perceived risks. When perceived risks, particularly security risks, are deemed to outweigh the anticipated benefits, tourists will postpone travel, choose alternative destinations, or modify their travel behaviour.

The theory further distinguishes between objective risk (the actual statistical probability of harm) and subjective risk (the tourists' perception of that probability), noting that subjective risk perceptions are often inflated by media coverage, word-of-mouth reports, and travel advisories. For Rivers State, this implies that even if the actual probability of harm to tourists may be relatively low in certain areas of the state, the subjective perception of risk may be dramatically higher due to sustained negative media coverage, thereby depressing tourist demand beyond what objective risk conditions would justify.

Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory, pioneered by Hunt (1975) and elaborated by subsequent scholars including Baloglu and McCleary (1999), argues that a destination's image is a critical determinant of tourist destination choice. Destination image is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive components (beliefs and knowledge about the destination), affective components (emotional responses to the destination), and conative components (behavioural intentions toward the destination).

Insecurity fundamentally corrupts destination image through its impacts on all three components. At the cognitive level, widely reported security incidents create specific negative beliefs about the safety of the destination. At the affective level, these beliefs generate fear, anxiety, and avoidance motivation. At the conative level, the negative cognitive and affective evaluations translate into decisions to avoid visiting the destination. For Rivers State, the cumulative negative imagery generated by decades of militancy, kidnapping, and armed conflict has likely created deeply entrenched negative destination images that constrain tourist demand even in periods of relative security.

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model provides a useful framework for understanding the developmental trajectory of tourism destinations in Rivers State under conditions of insecurity. The TALC posits that tourism destinations evolve through six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either rejuvenation or decline.

Rivers State's tourism sector can be characterised as cycling between stagnation and decline phases, perpetuated by recurrent security crises that prevent the consolidation and growth needed to move toward rejuvenation. Each security incident pushes the destination back toward decline, while brief periods of relative security allow tentative movement toward development, only for the next security crisis to reverse these gains. Breaking this cycle requires sustained and credible security improvements that allow the destination to build the critical mass of tourist arrivals needed to generate the self-reinforcing

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dynamics of tourism development.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on the relationship between insecurity and tourism have been conducted in diverse contexts, providing a rich evidence base for understanding how security conditions affect tourism performance. Enders and Sandler (1991) conducted a pioneering quantitative study examining the impact of terrorism on tourism in Europe, finding that terrorist incidents significantly reduced tourist arrivals in affected countries and that these effects persisted for several years after individual incidents. Their study established that the tourism elasticity to terrorism is highly negative, meaning that small increases in terrorist activity produce disproportionately large decreases in tourist arrivals.

In the African context, Raza and Jawaid (2013) examined the impact of political instability and terrorism on tourism in Pakistan and found strong negative relationships between security incidents and tourist arrivals and tourism receipts. Similarly, Akinboade and Braimoh (2010) studied tourism demand in South Africa and found that crime rates significantly deterred international tourist arrivals. Their study is particularly relevant because South Africa's tourism challenges, while different in specific content, share structural similarities with Rivers State's situation.

Within Nigeria, Uwadiae (2016) examined the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on tourism in northern Nigeria and found that the insurgency had virtually destroyed the tourism sector in affected states, with hotel occupancy rates dropping below 20%, tour operators shutting down operations, and significant unemployment in the tourism value chain. While the specific security dynamics differ from those in Rivers State, the magnitude of tourism impact provides a useful benchmark.

Regarding Rivers State specifically, Ekwueme and Nwachukwu (2019) conducted a qualitative study on the perceptions of tourists regarding security in Port Harcourt and found that most respondents rated security as their primary concern when considering travel to Rivers State. The study found that international tourists were particularly deterred by the state's security reputation, with many citing kidnapping as their primary fear. Domestic tourists from other parts of Nigeria were also deterred, though to a lesser degree, with armed robbery and cultism ranking as their primary security concerns.

Okonkwo and Ibezim (2020) studied the impact of Niger Delta militancy on ecotourism development in Rivers State and found that militancy had rendered large areas of the state's ecotourism resources inaccessible to both domestic and international tourists. The study documented the closure of several ecotourism sites due to security concerns and the abandonment of ecotourism development projects by investors. The researchers estimated that Rivers State lost approximately 60-70% of its potential ecotourism revenue due to militancy-related insecurity over the period 2005-2015.

Summary of Literature Review

The foregoing review of literature reveals a consistent and robust finding across diverse contexts: insecurity, in its various manifestations, significantly undermines tourism development by deterring tourist arrivals, corrupting destination image, discouraging investment, and reducing tourism revenue. The specific mechanisms through which insecurity affects tourism are well-theorised, with Tourist Risk Perception Theory, Destination Image Theory, and Butler's TALC Model providing complementary frameworks for understanding the phenomenon.

In the specific context of Rivers State, the literature suggests that the state's pronounced insecurity challenges have imposed severe costs on its tourism sector, constraining it well below its natural potential. However, the existing empirical literature on Rivers State tourism and insecurity is limited in scope, relying largely on qualitative

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approaches and small samples. This study addresses this gap by employing a more systematic survey methodology and a larger sample to provide more robust empirical evidence on the effects of insecurity on tourism destinations in Rivers State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because it enables the systematic collection of data from a representative sample of respondents to describe the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of a defined population. Given the study's objective of assessing the effects of insecurity on tourism in Rivers State through the perceptions and experiences of tourism stakeholders, a survey approach is well-suited to generating the required data. The design also allows for the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Rivers State, a state in southern Nigeria with an estimated population of over 7 million people across 23 local government areas. Rivers State is bounded to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by Akwa Ibom State, to the north by Imo and Abia States, and to the west by Bayelsa and Delta States. The state capital is Port Harcourt, which serves as the commercial hub of the Niger Delta region and the centre of the state's tourism activity.

Specific data collection sites were: Port Harcourt (the cosmopolitan capital and main tourism gateway); Bonny Island (an important historical and ecotourism site); Degema (a riverine community with cultural and ecotourism attractions); Ogoni communities (culturally significant areas facing unique security dynamics); and Obio/Akpor LGA (a major hospitality and commercial zone adjacent to Port Harcourt).

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all stakeholders in the Rivers State tourism sector, broadly categorised into: tourists (domestic and international) who have visited Rivers State; hospitality workers employed in hotels, restaurants, and related establishments; tour operators and travel agents operating in Rivers State; and community members in selected tourism destination areas. The exact population size is difficult to determine due to the absence of comprehensive tourism registers, but it is estimated to run into several thousand across the four categories.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 120 respondents was selected for this study using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, the study areas were purposively selected based on their significance as tourism destinations or tourism-related activity centres. In the second stage, respondents were drawn from the four stakeholder categories using quota sampling to ensure representation: tourists (30 respondents); hospitality workers (40 respondents); tour operators and travel agents (20 respondents); and community members in tourism destination areas (30 respondents). Within each quota, respondents were selected using convenient and snowball sampling methods, given the difficulty of accessing a comprehensive sampling frame.

Instruments of Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary instruments. The main instrument was a structured questionnaire containing 45 items organised into five sections: Section A covered

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respondent demographics; Section B assessed the nature and prevalence of insecurity in Rivers State; Section C examined the effects of insecurity on tourist arrivals; Section D evaluated the impact of insecurity on tourism infrastructure and investment; and Section E gathered data on the socio-economic consequences of insecurity on tourism-dependent communities. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Supplementary qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured key informant interviews conducted with 10 purposively selected individuals including tourism officials, security experts, hotel managers, and community leaders. The interviews were audio-recorded with respondents' consent and subsequently transcribed and analysed thematically.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review. The instrument was submitted to five experts in Tourism Management, Security Studies, and Research Methodology for review of item relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the instrument. Face validity was also confirmed through a pilot test administered to 15 tourism stakeholders who were not part of the main study.

Reliability was assessed through the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method. The pilot test data yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.84 for the overall instrument, which exceeds the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978), confirming adequate internal consistency. Individual section alpha values ranged from 0.79 to 0.91, all indicating acceptable reliability.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions. Inferential statistics were employed for hypothesis testing: the Chi-Square test was used to test hypotheses involving nominal categorical variables, while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test hypotheses involving the relationship between continuous variables. All statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative data from key informant interviews were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Recurring themes and patterns in interview transcripts were identified, coded, and organised into thematic categories that provided contextual depth and interpretive richness to the quantitative findings.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Presentation of Data

Response Rate and Demographic Profile

Of the 120 questionnaires administered, 113 were returned and found to be adequately completed, representing a response rate of 94.2%, which is considered excellent for survey research. The remaining 7 questionnaires were either not returned or were too incompletely filled to be usable.

Analysis of respondents' demographics revealed that 65 (57.5%) were male while 48 (42.5%) were female, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. In terms of age, the largest cohort was in the 26-35 age group (38.9%), followed by 36-45 years (27.4%), 18-25 years (21.2%), and 46 years and above (12.4%). Educational attainment was high, with

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52.2% holding university degrees, 24.8% holding postgraduate qualifications, and 23.0% having polytechnic or college certificates.

Nature and Prevalence of Insecurity in Rivers State

Respondents were asked to identify the types of insecurity that most significantly affect tourism in Rivers State. The findings indicate the following ranking by perceived significance:

Kidnapping for ransom: 89.4% of respondents identified this as a major security threat to tourism.
Armed robbery and violent crime: 84.1% of respondents identified this as significant.
Cultism and gang violence: 79.6% identified this as a significant threat.
Militancy and pipeline vandalism: 75.2% identified this as significant.
Inter-communal conflicts: 68.1% identified this as a significant threat.
Political violence: 61.9% identified this as significant.

These findings confirm that kidnapping is the most acutely perceived security threat to tourism in Rivers State, consistent with the literature on Niger Delta insecurity and its effects on expatriate and tourism activity in the region.

Effects of Insecurity on Tourist Arrivals

Table 4.1 presents respondents' perceptions of the effects of insecurity on tourist arrivals in Rivers State. The items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with Mean scores above 3.00 indicating agreement and below 3.00 indicating disagreement.

Results show strong agreement with statements indicating negative effects of insecurity on tourist arrivals. The statement "Insecurity has significantly reduced the number of tourists visiting Rivers State" recorded the highest mean score of 4.61 (SD = 0.42). This was followed by "International tourists avoid Rivers State due to security concerns" (Mean = 4.53, SD = 0.51), "Insecurity has damaged the reputation of Rivers State as a tourism destination" (Mean = 4.48, SD = 0.55), and "Travel advisories issued by foreign governments due to insecurity deter international tourists" (Mean = 4.41, SD = 0.62).

These findings indicate overwhelming consensus among respondents that insecurity has severely reduced tourist arrivals in Rivers State, with international tourists being particularly deterred. Key informant interviews reinforced these findings, with tourism officials noting a marked reduction in international tourist arrivals from European and North American markets over the past two decades.

Impact of Insecurity on Tourism Infrastructure and Investment

Respondents' assessments of insecurity's impact on tourism infrastructure and investment revealed consistent patterns of negative effects. The vast majority of respondents (87.6%) agreed that insecurity has discouraged foreign direct investment in Rivers State's tourism sector. An equally high proportion (83.2%) agreed that insecurity has led to the closure or downsizing of tourism-related businesses. The statement "Insecurity has prevented the development of tourism infrastructure in Rivers State" elicited agreement from 81.4% of respondents.

Key informant interviews with hotel managers corroborated these findings. One hotel manager noted: "In the peak days of militancy, our occupancy rates dropped from above 70% to below 30%. We had to lay off staff and cancel planned expansion projects." Another respondent, a tour operator, described abandoning planned investments in ecotourism facilities in riverine communities due to security concerns. These qualitative insights underscore the severity of insecurity's impact on tourism investment and infrastructure development.

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Insecurity and Destination Image of Rivers State

Respondents were asked to evaluate the effect of insecurity on the destination image of Rivers State. Findings indicate that 91.2% of respondents agreed that "insecurity has created a negative image of Rivers State as a tourism destination." Similarly, 88.5% agreed that "media reports of insecurity in Rivers State deter potential tourists." The statement "The negative security image of Rivers State is difficult to change despite improvements in security" was agreed to by 79.6% of respondents, suggesting awareness of the persistence of negative destination image even after security conditions improve.

Socio-Economic Consequences for Tourism-Dependent Communities

Analysis of the socio-economic consequences of insecurity on tourism-dependent communities revealed significant negative effects. Results show that 86.7% of respondents agreed that insecurity has led to unemployment and loss of livelihoods in tourism-dependent communities. Poverty and economic marginalisation were identified as consequences by 83.2% of respondents. The closure of tourism-related businesses due to insecurity was identified as a consequence by 79.6% of respondents. The migration of skilled tourism workers to more secure locations was identified by 71.7% of respondents.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H01: Insecurity has no significant effect on tourist arrivals in Rivers State.

To test this hypothesis, a Chi-Square test of association was conducted between insecurity levels (as perceived by respondents) and tourist arrival trends. The analysis yielded a Chi-Square value of $\chi^2 = 47.23$ with degrees of freedom df = 4 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The conclusion is that insecurity has a statistically significant effect on tourist arrivals in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two

H02: Insecurity has no significant impact on tourism infrastructure development and investment in Rivers State.

Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The correlation between perceived insecurity levels and investment/infrastructure development yielded a Pearson's $r = -0.712$ with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The strong negative correlation and significant p-value lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The conclusion is that insecurity has a significant negative impact on tourism infrastructure development and investment in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three

H03: Insecurity has no significant influence on the destination image of Rivers State.

Chi-Square analysis of the relationship between insecurity and destination image yielded $\chi^2 = 52.67$, df = 4, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. The conclusion is that insecurity has a statistically significant and negative influence on the destination image of Rivers State as a tourism destination.

Hypothesis Four

H04: There is no significant relationship between insecurity and the socio-economic wellbeing of tourism-dependent communities in Rivers State.

Pearson's correlation analysis yielded $r = -0.689$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant negative relationship between insecurity and the socio-economic wellbeing of tourism-dependent communities in Rivers State.

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Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies reviewed in Chapter Two. The rejection of all four null hypotheses confirms that insecurity exerts significant negative effects across multiple dimensions of tourism in Rivers State, including tourist arrivals, infrastructure investment, destination image, and the socio-economic wellbeing of tourism-dependent communities.

The finding that kidnapping is the most widely perceived security threat to tourism corroborates the specific literature on the Niger Delta security crisis and its impacts on expatriate and business activity in Rivers State. This aligns with Ekwueme and Nwachukwu's (2019) finding that kidnapping was tourists' primary security concern when considering travel to Rivers State.

The finding that 89.4% of respondents indicated that insecurity has significantly reduced tourist arrivals is consistent with the broader international literature, including Enders and Sandler's (1991) finding of strong negative tourism elasticities to security incidents. The particularly pronounced deterrent effect on international tourists, noted by 88.5% of respondents, is consistent with the role of travel advisories as amplifiers of security risk perceptions documented by Sönmez (1998).

The strong negative correlation between insecurity and tourism investment ($r = -0.712$) corroborates the qualitative evidence from key informant interviews about hotel closures, project cancellations, and capital flight from the tourism sector. This finding has important implications for Rivers State's economic development agenda, given tourism's potential to serve as an engine of diversification from oil dependence.

The finding regarding destination image persistence (79.6% of respondents agreeing that Rivers State's negative security image is difficult to change even when security improves) is particularly concerning and aligns with the asymmetry noted in Destination Image Theory. It suggests that the path to tourism recovery in Rivers State will require not only actual security improvements but sustained and credible destination marketing campaigns to shift entrenched negative perceptions.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the effects of insecurity on tourism destinations in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the persistent underperformance of Rivers State's tourism sector relative to its considerable natural, cultural, and heritage endowments, and by the widely observed association between the state's security challenges and its tourism difficulties. Five specific objectives guided the study: to assess the nature and types of insecurity affecting tourism; to examine the effects of insecurity on tourist arrivals; to evaluate the impact on tourism infrastructure and investment; to determine the effect on destination image; and to investigate socio-economic consequences for tourism-dependent communities.

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, collecting primary data from 113 respondents comprising tourists, hospitality workers, tour operators, and community members through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Secondary data were obtained from published literature, government reports, and tourism statistics. Four hypotheses were formulated and tested using Chi-Square tests and Pearson's correlation analysis.

Key findings include: kidnapping (89.4%), armed robbery (84.1%), cultism (79.6%), militancy (75.2%), and inter-communal conflicts (68.1%) were identified as the most significant security threats to tourism in Rivers State; insecurity has significantly reduced tourist arrivals (agreed by 89.4% of respondents); insecurity has discouraged investment

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(87.6%) and caused business closures (83.2%) in the tourism sector; insecurity has created a negative destination image of Rivers State (91.2%); and insecurity has led to unemployment and socio-economic hardship in tourism-dependent communities (86.7%). All four null hypotheses were rejected, confirming statistically significant negative effects of insecurity on Rivers State tourism.

Conclusion

The evidence generated by this study leads to the unambiguous conclusion that insecurity constitutes the most critical obstacle to tourism development in Rivers State. The pervasive security challenges that have characterised the state for decades — rooted in the political economy of the Niger Delta but now encompassing diverse forms of violent crime — have imposed severe costs on the tourism sector through reduced tourist arrivals, decimated investment, corrupted destination image, and impoverishment of tourism-dependent communities.

Rivers State's abundant tourism resources remain largely untapped as a result of these security conditions. The state's potential to harness tourism as a driver of economic diversification, employment generation, and revenue mobilisation is being systematically undermined by insecurity. The persistence of negative destination image even during periods of relative security improvement underscores the need for sustained, long-term interventions that address both the root causes of insecurity and its reputational legacies.

The study concludes that without credible and sustained improvements in security conditions, the Rivers State tourism sector will continue to underperform relative to its potential, and the communities that depend on tourism for their livelihoods will continue to bear disproportionate socio-economic costs. Addressing insecurity is therefore not only a security imperative but an essential condition for sustainable tourism development in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Strengthened Security Governance

The Rivers State Government should intensify collaboration with federal security agencies to address the root causes and manifestations of insecurity, with specific attention to the anti-kidnapping squad, community policing initiatives, and the deradicalisation and rehabilitation of ex-militants. A specialised tourism police unit should be established to protect tourists and tourism facilities.

Community Engagement in Tourism Security

Tourism development strategies should prioritise the empowerment of local communities as stakeholders in and beneficiaries of tourism. Community-based tourism initiatives should be developed to give residents a direct economic stake in tourism security, thereby converting communities from potential sources of insecurity into partners in tourism protection.

Destination Image Rehabilitation

The Rivers State Tourism Bureau and the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation should develop a sustained and well-funded destination marketing campaign to rehabilitate the image of Rivers State as a tourism destination. This campaign should leverage digital media, travel trade engagements, and familiarity trips (fam trips) for travel agents, journalists, and influencers from key source markets.

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Tourism Infrastructure Development

The Rivers State Government should accelerate investment in tourism infrastructure, including road access to major tourism sites, waterway transportation, hospitality facilities, and tourism information centres. Public-private partnership frameworks should be developed to attract private sector investment in tourism infrastructure, with security guarantees and investment incentives.

Crisis Communication and Management

The Rivers State Tourism Bureau should develop a robust crisis communication and management plan specifically designed to manage security incidents affecting tourism. The plan should include protocols for rapid response to security incidents, communication with tourists and tour operators, and recovery marketing initiatives.

Youth Empowerment and Alternative Livelihoods

Given that youth unemployment and marginalisation are root causes of insecurity in Rivers State, targeted youth empowerment programmes with a focus on tourism-related skills development should be implemented. Vocational training in hospitality, tour guiding, cultural performance, and ecotourism should be scaled up to create legitimate economic opportunities for at-risk youth.

Research and Monitoring

Future research should develop a comprehensive tourism security index specific to Rivers State, enabling regular monitoring of the security-tourism nexus and evidence-based adjustments to policy interventions. Longitudinal studies tracking the relationship between security improvements and tourism recovery would provide valuable policy insights.

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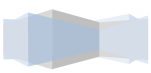
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Appendix
Appendix I: Research Questionnaire

Questionnaire on Effects of Insecurity on Tourism Destination in Rivers State

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for an academic research study on the effects of insecurity on tourism destinations in Rivers State, Nigeria. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Please answer all questions as honestly and accurately as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

SECTION A: Demographic Information
Please tick (✓) the appropriate option.

1. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female
2. Age: [ ] 18-25 years [ ] 26-35 years [ ] 36-45 years [ ] 46 years and above
3. Educational Qualification: [ ] SSCE/WAEC [ ] ND/NCE [ ] HND/B.Sc. [ ] Postgraduate
4. Occupation: [ ] Tourist [ ] Hospitality Worker [ ] Tour Operator/Travel Agent [ ] Community Resident
5. How long have you been involved with tourism in Rivers State? [ ] < 1 year [ ] 1-5 years [ ] 6-10 years [ ] > 10 years

SECTION B: Nature and Prevalence of Insecurity
Please rate the following security threats as they affect tourism in Rivers State on a scale of 1-5: 1 = Not Significant, 2 = Slightly Significant, 3 = Moderately Significant, 4 = Very Significant, 5 = Extremely Significant.

6. Kidnapping for ransom: 1 2 3 4 5
7. Armed robbery: 1 2 3 4 5
8. Cultism/gang violence: 1 2 3 4 5
9. Militancy/pipeline vandalism: 1 2 3 4 5
10. Inter-communal conflicts: 1 2 3 4 5
11. Political violence: 1 2 3 4 5

SECTION C: Effects on Tourist Arrivals
Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement: SA = Strongly Agree (5), A = Agree (4), U = Undecided (3), D = Disagree (2), SD = Strongly Disagree (1).

12. Insecurity has significantly reduced tourist arrivals in Rivers State. SA A U D SD
13. International tourists avoid Rivers State due to security concerns. SA A U D SD
14. Travel advisories issued by foreign governments deter tourists. SA A U D SD
15. Insecurity has damaged the reputation of Rivers State as a tourism destination. SA A U D SD
16. Hotel occupancy rates have declined due to insecurity. SA A U D SD

SECTION D: Impact on Tourism Infrastructure and Investment
17. Insecurity has discouraged foreign investment in Rivers State tourism. SA A U D SD
18. Insecurity has led to closure of tourism businesses. SA A U D SD

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19. Tourism infrastructure development has been hampered by insecurity. SA A U D SD
20. Local investors avoid the tourism sector due to insecurity. SA A U D SD

SECTION E: Socio-Economic Consequences

21. Insecurity has caused unemployment in tourism-dependent communities. SA A U D SD
22. Community members have abandoned tourism-related livelihoods due to insecurity. SA A U D SD
23. Poverty has increased in tourism-dependent communities due to insecurity. SA A U D SD
24. Skilled tourism workers have migrated to safer locations. SA A U D SD

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

