Travel Characteristics of University Students and Implications for Domestic Tourism: A Study of Takoradi Technical University

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Abstract—**Domestic tourism has grown to become a driving force of many economies globally and when developed can stand the shocks of pandemics which affect international tourism in receipts and arrivals. The scope of tourism markets is of different segments, which when given the necessary attention generate benefits to tourism destinations, inclusive of the segment of students' market. However, students' market segment is under exploited, requiring attention. Therefore, considering Ghana's tourism resources and students' enrolments, the study sought to assess the travel patterns and preference of university students and how implications can be strategically evaluated for the promotion of domestic tourism. The study was limited to students of Takoradi Technical University students. The study employed a quantitative approach and adopted questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Data was analysed and presented using IBM SPSS version 21 and the results were presented in frequencies, tables, pie charts and histogram. Key findings showed that students individually organize their travel, consider safety and location in the choice of destination, and use internet and social media in search of travel information. The study provides content for tourism institutions, enterprises and service providers on the preference and patterns of university students travel. Also, it provides information to decision makers and serves as content to destination managers in giving attention to university students as a market segment in the promotion of domestic tourism.**

Index Terms—**Domestic tourism, Travel characteristics, University students.**

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has been recognized as a sector making substantial impacts on the development of many economies; generating multiplier effects on the economic and the social dimensions of economies, through the generation of income in related sectors of an economy (Nurov, et al., 2021). It is described as the fastest growing industry in many developed and developing countries, which contributes to the harmony of places, people and their cultures (Mbagwu, et al, 2016; Manzoor, et al., Rehman, 2019). Likewise, the economic growth from tourism has the potential to alleviate poverty in developing economies (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). Receipts from international tourism hit 3 trillion mark in 2022 with more than 900 million tourists (UNWTO; World Tourism Barometer, 2023). While domestic tourism arrivals globally were 6 billion as against 1,326 million international tourists in 2018, acknowledging domestic tourism not to be underestimated, but highlighted as a key force in the growth of tourism (Kifworo, et al ,2020; UNWTO, 2018). Again, domestic tourism demand has proven to be predictable and stable, not much disposed to seasonality which characterizes the tourism industry (Ndivo, et al., 2012). It acts as catalyst to the uncertainties of international tourism, serving as a pillar in creating a strong tourism industry for many nations (World Travel Tourism Council, 2019). Despite, its global importance, domestic tourism's highest potential in Africa has not been fully achieved (Kifworo et al.,2020), therefore requiring increasing efforts in the promotion of the sector.

2. Literature Review

The tourism sector has many segments which can be exploited to the benefits of many economies. According to Antti (2013), a market can be segmented into group tourists with similar characteristics in terms of their travel behaviour or motivations. Therefore, identifying the right segment and serving them with the appropriate resources can bring competitive advantage to the destination. To Akam and Bassey (2014), tourism is influenced mostly by tourism potentials in a destination such as the natural, cultural, art and other resources which attract, interest and appeal to people. Hence, the development of these resources generates good benefits to the local communities hosting the resources. Ghana is endowed with many natural and physical resources which can generates many benefits when they are well exploited (Adam, 2015; Guri, et al., 2021). However, variables such as demographic, geographical, psychographic, and behavioral influence the involvement of people in domestic tourism (Baker & Crompton, 2000; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). While, Kifworo, et al., (2020) perceived travel preferences contribute greatly in the decision to participate in domestic tourism. Consequently, the need to identify and align the rights tourism resources to the right segments and their characteristics to create benefits for the destination (Rid, et al., 2014).

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School groups, specifically, University communities' segment are assumed to be under researched and poorly understood segment of the tourism industry, and in most travel surveys (Ritchie & Coughlan, 2004; Wang et al. 2012; Volosin et al. 2014). On the other hand, it has become common to see bus load of students from various parts of the country undertaking tours to various attraction sites of the Ghana. The study therefore sought to assess the travel characteristics and preferences of university students, which can be aligned to the tourism resources of Ghana and be harnessed for domestic tourism.

The study reveals the travel characteristics and preferences of the student market segment, specifically university students. It provides an understanding university student travel preference which can be targeted and harnessd as a market segment for domestic tourism. In addition, the information on students' preferences in relation to attractions and the forms of tourism activities can become the basis for decision making by institutions responsible for tourism administration in Ghana. Meanwhile, technologically, the medium of access to information by students are aligned to internet and the social media handles, with the influence of AI in the delivery and marketing of services. This presents an opportunity for service providers and destination managers to easily promote Ghana's tourism attraction and activities to student groups.

3. Methodology

A quantitative research approach was used with a focus on cross-sectional design. This research design allowed the researchers to manage data and present the results of the phenomenon at hand without any manipulation. The study answered questions of the what, when, where, and how of the research problem (Sileyew,2019). Additionally, to obtain views from a broad spectrum of respondents, students from the various departments and levels in different faculties were purposively sampled and included in the study. Questionnaires were administered to respondents of both genders adopting the convenience sampling technique. Questions about the sociodemographic of the respondents, their travel characteristics, preference for tourism attractions and activities were asked in this study. Although, sample size of 391 was targeted with corresponding questionnaires distributed, 300 were realized, representing 76.7 % response rate. Again, ethical issues such as anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were addressed in the study. Data from the study was analysed using IBM SPSS version 21 and the results were presented in frequencies, tables, pie charts and histogram.

4. Findings and Discussions

This aspect focused on the analysis of data and has been presented in line with the objectives of the study. The study sought to assess the travel patterns and preferences of university students and the implications for domestic tourism development.

The result reveals that the majority of the respondents were female students, comprising 57.7% of the sample, while male students make up the remaining 42.3%. This is an indication that more female participated in the study than male students. Likewise, students below the ages of 25 years and below forms the largest segment of the respondents (64%). Age bracket of 26-30 years represented 27.6% and the least of 1% for the age range of 46 years and above. These findings suggest that university students are mostly youth, who are flexible and can be harnessed for domestic tourism since age has an influence in the choice and the level of involvement in tourism activities (Odunga, 2010). In the same vein, students across various academic levels were considered, results showed representation at level 200 (29.3%), level 100 (26.3%), level 300 (27.3%), and level 400 (17%). This diversity presents an opportunity to engage students from different academic stages in domestic tourism.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	127	42.3
Female	173	57.7
Total	***300***	***100.0***
Age		
Below 25 years	192	64
26 – 30	83	27.6
31-34	11	3.6
35-40	7	2.3
41-45	4	1.3
46 and above	3	1
Total	***300***	***100.0***
Level		
100	79	26.3
200	88	29.3
300	82	27.3
400	51	17
Total	***300***	***100.0***
Marital Status		
Single	180	60
Married	40	13.3
Dating	80	26.7
Total	***300***	***100.0***
Occupation		
Student	274	91.3
Student -Worker	26	8.7
Total	***300***	***100.0***
Faculty		
Applied Sciences	79	26.3
Applied Arts and Technology	47	15.7
Business Studies	69	23
Engineering	82	27.3
Built and Natural Environment	22	7.3
Total	***300***	***100.0***

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Marital status is another important characteristic to consider when targeting university students, the data shows that majority (60%) of the respondents were single, while 13.7% were married and 26.7% were dating. This finding cannot be farfetched looking at the age range of students. The information can inform marketing strategies and help tailor travel offerings in terms of travel experiences, activities, or budget-friendly

options, while married or dating students might prefer relaxed and couple-oriented experiences.

Furthermore, the occupational distribution reveals that almost all of the respondents (91.3%) are students, while 8.7% are student-workers. This highlights that a significant portion of the university student market for domestic tourism consists of students who have the time and flexibility to engage in travel experiences. Additionally, targeting working students who may have more financial resources to invest in tourism activities can be an effective strategy to capture this market segment. This result buttresses Volosin, 2014, Nayar & Nayafi, 2012 and Eom et al., (2009) assertions that unemployed students make more travel trips than employed students in universities.

Lastly, the distribution across faculties provides insights into the diverse academic interests of university students. Applied Sciences (26.3%), Engineering (27.3%), Business Studies (23%) have the highest representation, while Applied Arts (5.7%), and Built and Natural Environment (7.3%) were also represented. The academic backgrounds and interests of students in different faculties may help in developing tourism offerings that align with their fields of study. For instance, arts and culture-focused experiences for students in Applied Arts and Technology or sustainable tourism initiatives for those in Built and Natural Environment.
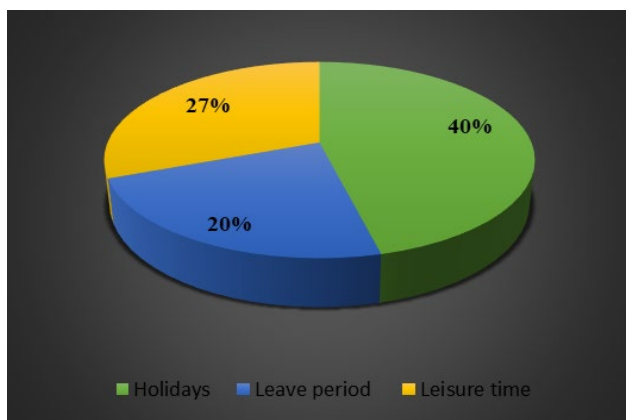

Fig. 1. Preferred travel time among respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result shows that 40% of university students prefer to travel during holidays. 20% of university students indicated that they prefer to travel during leave periods. 27% of university students mentioned that they prefer to travel during leisure time. This suggests that these students are more likely to plan their trips around scheduled breaks such as vacations, holidays, or other public holidays. Shunmei Yu (2018) also indicated the result in a study at Beijing Jiaotong University, that university students travel during holidays. Holidays often provide extended periods of time off from academic commitments, allowing students to explore and experience new destinations more extensively.

The data provided suggests that the Greater Accra Region is the most visited region in Ghana, with 45% of the students choosing to visit the destination. The Central Region comes in second, attracting approximately 35% of tourists, while the Western Region receives the least number of visitors, with

around 20% of tourists selecting this region. The popularity of the Greater Accra Region among tourists can be attributed to several factors such as the rich cultural and historical attractions homed in the capital city, as well as the economic and administrative center of the country. As a result, it offers a wide range of amenities, accommodations, and transportation options, making it a convenient and accessible destination for travellers. The region is also known for its bustling markets, such as the Makola Market, where visitors can immerse themselves in the vibrant local scene.
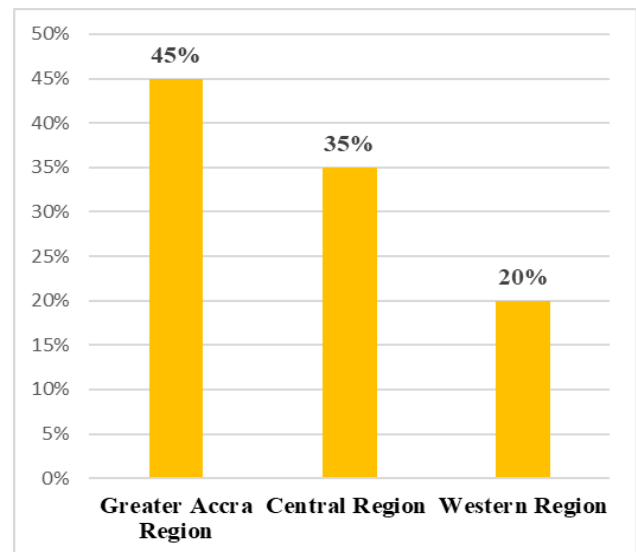

Fig. 2. Distribution of preferred regions for domestic tourism among university students in Ghana *(Source: Field Survey, 2023)*

Central Region attracts a considerable number of tourists; it falls behind the Greater Accra Region in terms of popularity. However, the Central Region is known for its historical significance as it was the hub of colonial administration during the British rule. It is home to several historical sites, including Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle, which played significant roles in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The Western Region, with the lowest percentage of tourists, may be less visited due to factors such as limited infrastructure and fewer well-known tourist attractions compared to the Greater Accra and Central regions. However, the Western Region is known for its beautiful landscapes, Ankos festival, Made in Tadi festival, Asabaako Musical festival, including pristine beaches, lush rainforests, and picturesque coastal towns like Takoradi and Busua.
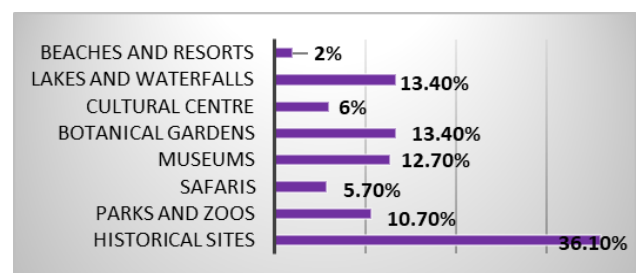

Fig. 3. Preferred tourist attractions among university students in Ghana
Source: Field Survey, 2023

From the given information, it was observed that historical sites are the most preferred tourist attraction among the surveyed university students, with a preference rate of 36.1%. Followed by museums, with a preference rate of 12.7%. Safaris and beaches/resorts had relatively lower preference rates of 5.7% and 2% respectively. It can be concluded that historical sites often provide a unique glimpse into a country's rich cultural and historical heritage, which Ghana can boast of (Boateng, et al., 2018) and the high preference for historical sites suggests that students have an interest in exploring Ghana's history and heritage.
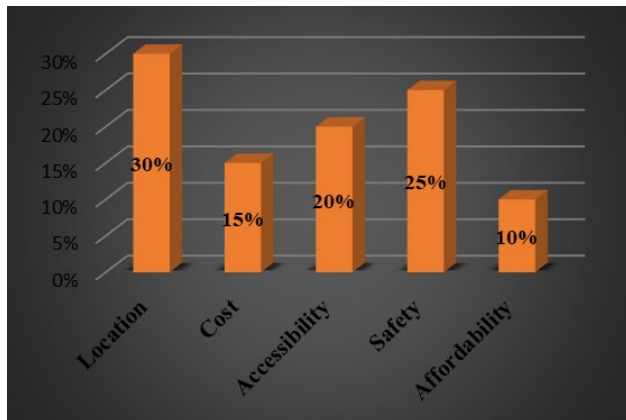

Fig. 4. Factors influencing students' attraction selection
Source: Field Survey, 2023

When university students consider choosing tourist attraction sites in Ghana, several factors come into play. Based on the given distribution, the preferences can be analyzed as follows:

Location, with a highest weight of 30%, holds significant factor for university students. Cost, which represent 20%, suggests that students are conscious of their budgets when selecting tourist attractions. Accessibility, accounted for 15%, highlights that students value attractions that are easily reachable. Safety, with the weight of 25%, signifies that students prioritize their well-being and security when choosing tourist attractions. Affordability (10%) suggests that students may look for attractions that offer additional discounts, promotions, or student-oriented packages and prioritize attractions that are conveniently for them.

The examination of travel patterns among university students reveals interesting insights into their preferred travel companions. The results indicate that a significant portion of university students, approximately 40%, prefer to individually organized travel, 30%, prefers to travel with educational groups, and church groups were preferred by 20% of university students. Society groups, preferred by 25% of the respondents. Organizational groups were the least (15%) preferred by the students. Though, Gyader (2011) discovered that Ghanaians like to travel in groups.

Brobbey, et al., (2021) emphasized that there is swift demand for information technology and social media usage among Ghanaian students from the basic level to the tertiary levels. This assertion had been buttressed by the results of the study; where internet is the most (60%) preferred medium, for

gathering information by respondents. Social media also played a significant role in shaping travel patterns among university students, with 30% of respondents indicating its usage for obtaining travel information. While travel brochures, and TV and radio advertisements still hold some relevance, only 5% of students respectively relied on them for gathering information. Shunmei Yu (2018) survey confirms the dominance (88.2%) of internet in students search for information on destinations.
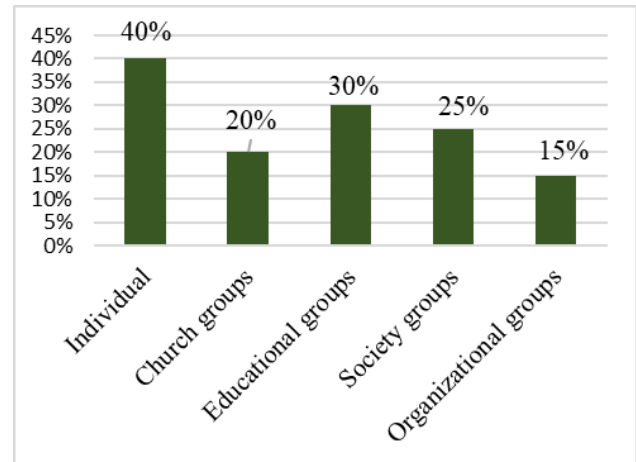

Fig. 5. Preferred travel party among students
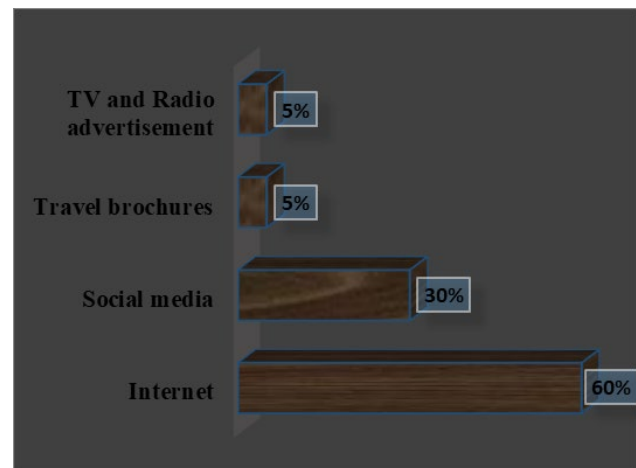*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Fig. 6. Information sources for destination research
Source: Field Survey, 2023

The examination of travel patterns of university students reveals interesting insights into their preferred destinations. According to the data collected, the majority of university students, accounting for 70%, prefer to travel within Ghana. This indicates a significant inclination towards exploring domestic tourism opportunities within their own country. On the other hand, approximately 30% of university students show a preference for traveling outside Ghana, suggesting a notable interest in international travel experiences.

The distribution indicates that a significant number (60%) of students spend 1 to 4 days during their visits. 20% of the respondents reported spending less than a day during their visits. This category likely includes day trips or brief excursions to nearby attractions. Surprisingly, another 20% of university

students reported spending 1-7 days or more during their visits. This suggests that a subset of students embraces longer trips, potentially undertaking more extensive explorations or immersing themselves in specific destinations. This implies that students often engage in short trips, possibly over weekends or during academic breaks or could be due to factors such as limited time or budget constraints. However, the short stay of students is common among domestic tourists, therefore, it's not surprising especially with students who prefer domestic travel (Wangombe, et al, 2022).
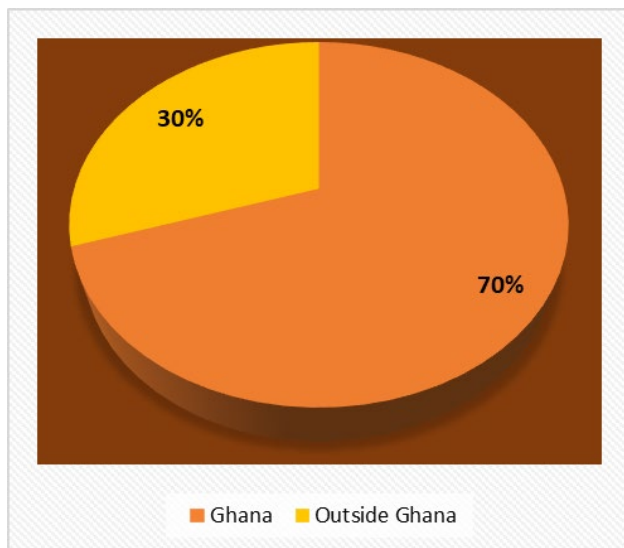

Fig. 7. Travel destinations of university students
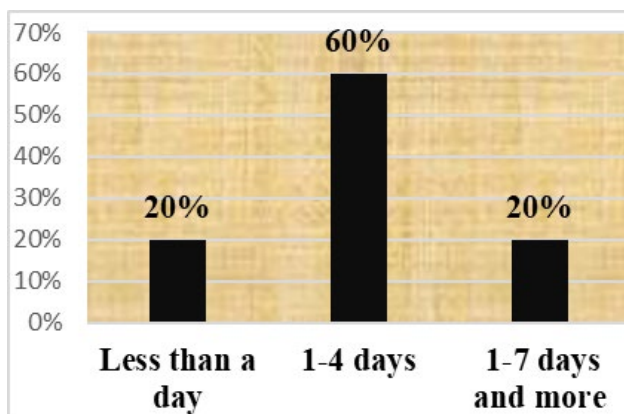*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Fig. 8. Duration of visits by university students to attractions in Ghana
Source: Field Survey, 2023

The results of examining the travel patterns of university students indicate that the majority, (70%), prefer using road transport. 25% of the respondents also prefer using air transport, especially for long journeys. Water transport, which includes boats or ferries, was preferred by a smaller proportion of university students, accounting for 5%. This suggests that road travel is the most common and accessible mode of transport for university students. Road transport provides flexibility, affordability, and convenience, allowing students to travel to various destinations within the country easily. It is likely that road transport, such as buses or private vehicles, is often chosen

due to its cost-effectiveness and availability, especially for shorter distances in Ghana.
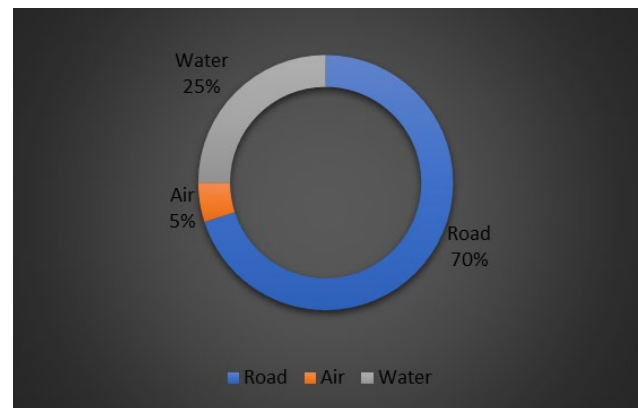

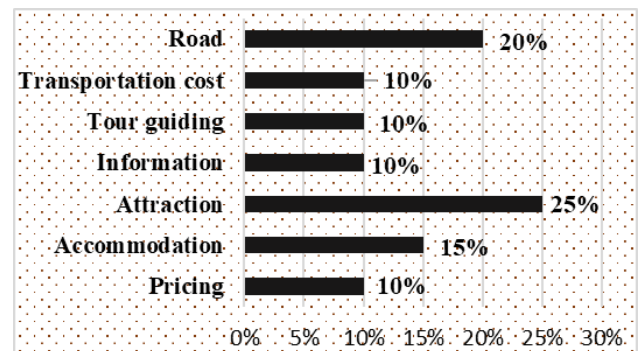Fig. 9. Mode of transport used by respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2023

Fig. 10. Perceived areas for improvement in students' travel itinerary satisfaction *(Source: Field Survey, 2023)*

The travel patterns of university students play a significant role in shaping the domestic tourism market. Understanding their preferences and identifying areas for improvement is crucial for attracting and retaining this valuable segment. In this scenario, university students were asked to indicate the item/area they would like to see improvement on their travel itineraries. The results reveal a distribution of preferences among different aspects.

Among the respondents, 25% expressed a desire for improvements in attractions. Accommodation also emerged as another area of concern, with 15% of students indicating a need for improvement. Pricing also garnered attention, with 10% of students expressing a desire for improvement in this aspect. In terms of information and tour guiding, 10% of students indicated a need for improvement. Transportation costs were identified as an area requiring improvement by 10% of respondents. Finally, roads garnered the highest percentage of 20% in terms of areas for improvement. This is argument made by Gyader (2011) that these needs are to be implemented throughout the country in order to encourage domestic travel.

5. Conclusions

Concluding, the findings of the study on university students' travel characteristics and preferences indicate that students express liking for travel, especially domestic. Though a notable

percentage of students expresses the desire for international travel experiences, an indication of their curiosity for global exploration and exposure to different cultures. Hence the study seemingly substantiates the potential of university students as a target market for domestic tourism. Highlighting their preferences, the study reveals that university students prefer to travel during holidays, while others choose to travel during leave periods or leisure time. This information provides service providers with insight in planning and promoting their offerings to align with these preferred travel periods.

Moreover, the study shows that university students in Ghana have a strong interest in domestic tourism and visiting tourist attractions. A significant proportion of students reported visiting tourist sites often, indicating their motivation to explore different destinations and engage with their country's heritage and attractions. The high frequency of visits suggests a deep appreciation for the cultural, historical, and natural offerings within Ghana. Among the tourism offerings, historical sites emerged as the most preferred attraction among university students, followed by museums, botanical gardens, and lakes/waterfalls. Ghana' being endowed with historical and cultural heritage, and natural beauty. It is therefore an indication that students have the potential to be harnessed to enjoy the recreational spaces and wildlife encounters in the country.

In addition, the study highlighted that majority of students prefer to individually organized their travel, before travelling with church groups, educational groups, society groups, or organizational groups. So is road transport the most common and accessible mode of travel for university students, followed by water transport and air transport, each with varying degrees of preference. These choices reflect their values, interests, and desire for personalized, spiritual, educational, social, or professional experiences.

Further, the upsurge of technology usage which has culminated into Artificial intelligence across various sectors manifested in this study; where internet emerged as the primary source of travel information by students, likewise the use of social media. While traditional mediums such as travel brochures, TV, and radio advertisements had lower impact. Likewise, factors such as location, cost, accessibility, and safety play significant roles in the decision-making process for university students in choosing tourist attraction sites. They prioritize attractions that are conveniently located, easily accessible, affordable, and offer a safe environment. These concerns suggest that tourism stakeholders and policymakers should focus on promoting and enhancing historical sites, museums, botanical gardens, lakes/waterfalls, and recreational spaces to cater to the preferences of university students as a valuable market segment for domestic tourism in Ghana. Efforts should also be made to improve the accessibility, affordability, and safety of these attractions to attract and accommodate a wider range of student visitors.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on students' satisfaction with attractions in Ghana, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Improve attraction site: Note must be taken to invest in site maintenance and preservation of attraction sites. Likewise, interpretation of the products to enhance the educational and cultural value of historical attractions especially. Develop interactive exhibits, provide informative signage, and offer guided tours to make the historical sites more engaging and enjoyable for students as they were the preferred destinations.

2. Promote tourism through technology: Since most students preferred the use of internet and social media to surf for travel information, travel agents, destination managers can market travel packages and information through this medium, hammering on educational, cultural and historical offerings of Ghana which the students prefer to know in their search for travel information.

3. Factors like accessibility is essential in the promotion of tourism. Road networks to tourism attractions must be critically looked at by the government institutions in Ghana responsible for it. Like the students, road transportation is the common means of transport to the common Ghanaian, it is therefore imperative to maintain, construct and make motorable road networks to the tourism destinations.

4. Maintain and develop popular attractions: Ghana is endowed with botanical gardens, parks, zoos, and lakes/waterfalls. However, though students showed interest, it was as expected. Hence, government and destination managers can create a peaceful and immersive environment where students can appreciate the beauty and ecological importance of botanical gardens. Address the areas of dissatisfaction expressed by students regarding botanical gardens and ensure well-maintained pathways and interactive features like educational signage and quality guided tours. Again, cleanliness, safety, accessibility and additional amenities such as seating areas, picnic spots, and recreational facilities must be considered.

5. The light shed on the travel patterns of students should be considered by policy makers in their bid to promote domestic tourism as shown in the 2013-2027 tourism plan. Needful of enhancing attractions, providing affordable and student-friendly accommodations, offering competitive pricing packages, improving information dissemination and tour guiding, and also ensuring accessible transportation options, as well as maintaining well-maintained and safe roads.

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