UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

ROLE OF TRAVEL INTERMEDIARIES IN GHANA: FOCUS ON TOUR OPERATORS IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

BY

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THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN TOURISM.

APRIL, 2015

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Name: ……………………………………………………………..

Signature: ………………………………. Date: ……………………………

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Name:…………………………………………………..

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the role of tour operators in Ghana's tourism development. The mixed method approach was employed to collect data. The sampling technique applied was a census covering as many tour operators as were available. The survey instruments used were both questionnaires which were self-administered and in-depth interview to supplement the data obtained from the questionnaire administration. Statistical techniques employed were frequency tables, cross tabulation, the t-test and factor analysis with varimax rotation.

The study found that tour operators facilitated travel arrangements and assessed quality of facilities. They also planned tours, offered education to clients, undertook pre-purchase risks and provided necessary information.. Ecotourism and heritage tourism were the top two tourist attractions patronized by Ghana's tour operators. Their products included annual cultural festivals such as Odwira, Aboakyir, Hogbetsotso and Fetu Afahye. The major marketing tools adopted by the tour operators were brochures websites.

Some implications of the findings were that tour operators in Ghana operated through linkages with other organisations. The findings also implied that foreign holiday makers were the most targeted markets by the country's tour operators. Tour operators in Ghana combined tour operation business with travel agency activities.

The study recommended that tour operation business in Ghana must be extended to other regional capitals in the country instead of being concentrated in the nation's capital, Accra. Finally, the role of the state in travel intermediation practices in Ghana was proposed for further research.

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DEDICATION

To my darling wife Becky and lovely children Clement, Philomena and Julius for their immense support and sacrifices.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANOVA	-	Analysis of Variance
ASTA	-	American Society of Travel Agents
ATA	-	Association of Travel Agents
B&B	-	Bread and Breakfast
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CIM	-	Chartered Institute of Marketing
CRAG	-	Car Rentals Association of Ghana
CRS	-	Computer Restoration System
ERP	-	Economic Recovery Programme
GATTA	-	Ghana Association of Travel and Tour Agencies
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GDS	-	Global Distribution System
GNP	-	Gross National Product
GTA	-	Ghana Tourism Authority
GTB	-	Ghana Tourist Board
GTDC	-	Ghana Tourist Development Company
IATA	-	International Air Transport Authority
IBO	-	In-Bound Operator
IBTO	-	In-Bound Tour Operator
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	-	In-Depth Interview
ITDP	-	Integrated Tourism Development Programme
MOT	-	Ministry of Tourism
MTDP	-	Medium Term Development Plan

NTA	-	National Tourism Authority
NTP	-	National Tourism Policy
OBTO	-	Out-Bound Tour Operator
PANAFEST	-	Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival
PNDC	-	Provisional National Deference Council
PVC	-	Physical Value Chain
SAP	-	Structural Adjustment Programme
SARS	-	Severe Acute Respiration Syndrome
SPSS	-	Statistical Product for Service Solution
SSA	-	Sub-Saharan Africa
TA	-	Travel Agents
TOUGHA	-	Tour Operators Union of Ghana
TSMTDP	-	Tourism Sector Medium Term Development Plan
UFTAA	-	Universal Federation of Travel Association
UNCTAD	-	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNWTO	-	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VFR	-	Visiting Friends and Relations
VVC	-	Virtual Value Chain
WS	-	Wholesalers
WTO	-	World Tourism Organisation
WTTC	-	World Travel and Tourism Council
WWW	-	World Wide Web

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The twenty-first century has welcomed the tourism industry with a mixed bag of shocks, uncertainties and a promising future. The shock that hit the industry began with the Y2K bug (i.e. a defect in the code of a computer programme). This was sustained through political forms like the war in the Middle East and terrorism, manifested in the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, (USA) as well as the attacks in Bali, Spain, the U.K and Egypt (Babu, Mishra & Panda, 2008). National shocks include Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of Guanding (Southern China), bird flu, mad cow disease, the tragic tsunami, the hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and global warming.

These major man-made and natural elements, coupled with their impact, though mild, on the global economic system and the continuous rise in oil prices have often thrown global tourism out of gear in the new millennium. These temprorary setbacks notwithstanding, the global tourism industry has been growing and remains resilient as one of the leading global industries, often portrayed as a diverse mega industry (Babu et al, 2008).

The tourism industry has, infact, become a global and highly competitive socio- economic and environmental activity in both developed and developing countries. Apart from generating foreign exchange earnings and revenue for governments, tourism is acclaimed to have the potential to become a powerful tool in pro-poor development strategies (Tourism Sector Medium Development Plan, 2010).

Estimates by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2006), bears witness to this fact. For instance, international tourism arrivals grew at 3.3 percent annually with the corresponding figure for earnings from tourism standing at 7.1 percent during the 2000-2005 period. The sector employed 200 million people and accounted for over 10 percent of world gross domestic product (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2004). Again some interesting facts show that tourism is one of the largest industries in the world with a reeord of 467 million tourists travelling in the first half of 2012. With a steady growth, it was predicted that the number of tourists will reach one billion world-wide by the end of the year (UNWTO, 2012).

Emphasising the importance of tourism, the WTTC observed that tourism is a powerful vehicle for economic growth and job creation the world over. Directly and indirectly the tourism sector is responsible for 8.8 percent of the world's jobs (258 million); 9.1 percent of the world's GDP (US$6 trillion); 5.8 percent of the world's exports (US$1.1 billion); and 4.5 percent of the world's investment (US$652 billion) (WTTC, 2011). Within Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) the WTTC estimates that 3.8 million jobs (including 2.4 million indirect jobs) could be created by the tourism industry over the next 10 years (World Bank, 2011).

From a small base of just 6.7 million visitors in 1990, SSA attracted 33.8 million visitors in 2012. Receipts from tourism in 2012 amounted to over US$36 billion and directly contributed 2.8 percent to the region's GDP (total contribution, including direct, indirect and induced, stood at 7.3% of GDP) (WTTC., 2013).

There are certain factors that appear to have contributed to maintaining the momentum of this growth. These factors can be summarized as: expanding global economic prosperity, strategic application of technology, evolving destination competition paradigms. Others are product invention and re-invention and proactive high-profile policy interventions, both collectively and by individual nations or institutions and establishments (Babu et al, 2008).

After World War I (1914-1918), there were radical changes with aircraft and cheap package holidays. Tour operators were formed, private car ownership increased and motorways, motels and services all saw increased growth (Syratt & Arches, 2003). According to these tourism experts, when people have more time to spare they begin to look for ways to spend these hours and usually turn to recreation. In the western world we have second-generation senior citizens, people who retire between the ages of 50 and 60, with some aged between 70 and 90, many of whom are all eager to travel and who constitute a growing area of the travel market. Statistics, according to Syratt and Arches (2003), show that 29 million people travel from Britain each year, spending 15 billion Euros.

Travel and tourism has become a global industry and is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing industries, if not the fastest industry in the world (World Travel and Tourism Council, 1995). It ranks as the largest industry in the world in terms of employment (one out of every 16 employees worldwide) and ranks in the top two or three industries in almost every country on nearly every measure (Mowlana & Smith, 1993). It is on record that the travel and tourism industry has become a major contributor to the gross national product (GNP) of many nations, where marketing of tourist destinations and other products has become a widely recognized practice for both public and private sector organizations. The rapid development of international tourism can thus be linked to the activities of travel intermediaries. Unlike other products which flow from producer to consumer, tourists flow to the product. This inverted distribution system relies on intermediaries to perform much more than simple delivery services.

Distribution channels are increasingly regarded as one of the most critical elements in marketing, as they determine the competitiveness and profitability of organisations (Gattorna, 1990; Christopher, 1991; Coughlan, Anderson, Stern & El-Ansary, 2006). Tourism distribution channels attract more attention by contemporary researchers and strategists. Their purpose is two-fold: to provide information to prospective tourists and intermediaries as well as to establish a mechanism which would enable consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations (Welborn, 1987; Middleton, 1994; Holloway, Humphreys, & Davidson, 2009).

In tourism the position of the distribution sector is much stronger: trade intermediaries (travel agents and tour operators as well as charter brokers, reservation systems and other travel distribution specialists) have a far greater power to influence and to direct demand than their counterparts in other industries. In fact, since distribution channels control demand they also have increased bargaining power in their relations with suppliers of tourist services and are in a position to influence their pricing, product policies and promotional activities (WTO,1975).

The idea of buying a package of travel accommodation and perhaps some ancillary services such as entertainment became an establishment in

Western Europe in the 1960s. Essentially, an “inclusive tour” is a package of transport and accommodation and other services which is sold as a single holiday at an all- inclusive price. This inclusive price is usually lower than could be obtained by conventional methods of booking transport and accommodation separately from individual hotel and tariffs.

The rapid development of international tourism can partly be explained by tremendous surge in international air traffic and the favourable package holidays promoted nationally and internationally by travel intermediaries. The tour operators, sometimes described as wholesalers, purchase services and break bulk (i.e. buy large quantities in order to sell in smaller quantities). The ability of tour operators to combine travel products and offer them to customers at prices generally lower than those available to individuals produces travel economy and convenience for tourists. According to Harris and Katz (1996) tour operators are specialists in the areas of marketing, public relations, and management because of their skills in linking a country’s touristic products and services to the traveller.

Bitner and Booms (1982) and McLellan and Noë (1976) identified another role of tour operators as a “gatekeeper of information”. Again, Lapage and Cormier (1977) maintain that a major function of tour operators is to create attractive destination images. Tour operators are said to organize the information search for individual tourists by distributing information, thereby minimizing external sources for information. Since tourism products are experiential and consumed on site, tour operators are an integral link in the distribution system (Morrison, 1989).

Tour operating became an important segment of the United States travel industry after World War II. Since the 1960s tour operating has expanded, largely because air carriers wanted to fill the increasing numbers of aircraft seats. The tour operating business consists primarily of planning, preparing, and marketing a vacation tour, including making reservations and consolidating transportation and ground services into a tour assembled for a departure date to a specific destination (Goeldner, Ritchie & McIntosh, 2009). Indeed tour operators represent one of the most powerful and most influential entities in the tourism industry. They have a strong influence on international flows from main generating markets to various destinations (Cavlek, 2002). Even though tour operators face modern challenges from electronic intermediation with the advent of the Internet, their role remains important.

According to World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimates of 2000, tour operators had a share of about 25% in the total international tourism market. This means that in the year 2000 tour operators organized at least 175 million international tourism trips. Therefore, the success of many destinations depends on whether foreign tour operators include them in their programmes (Cavlek, 2002).

Tour operators or wholesalers are seen to play a decisive role in destination choice. For Jenkins (1980) the tour wholesaler is a “catalyst of demand” who interprets the needs of his clients and packages this needs into destinations. His influence on the direction of demand is particularly significant to long haul, relatively expensive destinations, that is, most developing countries. Developing an effective distribution system is critical to the successful development and marketing of any form of tourism, especially in times of increased competition (Knowles & Grabowski, 1999). The importance of tourism distribution channels has been enchoed by other researchers such as Pearce and Schott (2005), Aleazer Matinez (2002) and William and Richter (2002).

According to WTO (2001) the four main tourist generating countries in the world, in order of size are: the United States of America, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Among the continents Europe generates the most international tourists and accounts for 12.5% of arrivals in developing countries (WTO, 2001). Although there is a growing trend towards independently arranged travel, significant numbers of tourists still use the services of a tour operator to book their holidays. The structure of tourism distribution channels has been categorised into: travel and tour companies; travel agencies and tour operators. Of these the majority are the travel and tours (47%), followed by travel agents (38%) and tour operators (15%) (Mintel, 2001).

Despite the disparity the role of the tour operator cannot be underestimated. The chief functionary in this system is the "tour operator". It is reported that in the U.K. alone, for instance, 28% of travel to developing countries (out of a total of 4 million U.K tourists) was booked through tour operators in 2000. The percentage bookings by tour operators in the U.K. increased to 37% by the year 2010, and it is projected to rise to 42% in 2011 and further to 48% by 2012. It is believed that the incease in packages can be attributed to people looking for greater value in the current economic climate, increased recognition of the protection that packages offer and the greater choice and flexibility of packages now available (Travel Trends Report, 2010).

Like their counterparts in other fledgling destinations in Africa, Ghana's tour operators are primarily involved in in-coming tour operations with ground handling activities. Similar to other studies which focus on tour operators in the travel distribution chain (Jenkins, 1980; Waters, 1984; Sheldon, 1986; Richards, 2001;) the role of tour operators in Ghana's tourism distribution channels is the focus of this study.

The Tourism System

The use of 'industry' to describe the business of tourism has been criticised by some tourism researchers such as Gunn and Var (2002) and Mill and Morrison (2009). Gunn and Var contend that the functioning tourism system consists of the supply side made up of attractions, services, promotion, information, and transportation. They went on to say that tourism is not only made up of hotels and airlines but rather a system of major components linked together in an intimate and interdependent relationship.

The demand side of tourism deals with the motive to travel from ones home of origin to a destination to experience nature and stay out for a period of not less than 24 hours. Mill and Morrision (2009) emphasise the interdependency in tourism and maintain that it consists of several interrelated parts working together to achieve common purposes which are known as the tourism system. To them, the tourism system is like the spider's web: touch one part and reverberations are felt throughout the system.

Travel trade as a system, is used to describe the full range of organisations that operate as intermediaries in the travel and tourism industry. These intermediaries include tour operators, wholesalers, and travel agents.

These organisations provide various elements of the total travel experience (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). The tourism system is about how each of the components in the travel trade work together. The purpose of working together is to achieve high economic returns for the country, the business and also maximum guest satisfaction. Tourism system will begin with transport or travel to the destination, ground transport, tour operators and guiding services. In all this networking of the tourism system the significance of the tour operator cannot be discounted.

Trends in Ghana's Tourism Development

Over the years, significant progress was recorded in Ghana's tourism development with the sector becoming one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. Currently, the tourism industry contributes about 6.2% to the GDP and grows at an average rate of 15%. Available statistics show that Ghana ranks 10th in terms of tourist arrivals in Africa and is considered a serious emerging destination with high potentials on the continent. (TSMTDP, 2010). Currently, tourism is considered to be the fourth largest source of foreign exchange earnings for Ghana after gold, cocoa, and inward remittances.

The historical development and promotion of tourism in Ghana which began with the accommodation section in the late 1950s stalled until the 1980s. Prior to 1985, tourism's potential as a major foreign exchange earner was not recognised in Ghana; indeed the sector was virtually neglected. The adoption of the Ghana Industrial Code of 1985, PNDC Law 116 marked a serious beginning of tourism development in the country.

Recognising the vital role that the tourism sector could play in the resuscitation of Ghana's economy under the then on-going Economic Recovery Programme (ERP)/ Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the government of the day made the tourism sector one of the five (5) priority areas of the economy in the Ghana Industrial Code (PNDC Law 116) of 1985. This Code was amended in areas of special priority in 1993 to offer generous concessions, guarantees, and incentives to foreign investors, financiers, and Ghanaian institutions. These institutions include the District Assemblies and local business entrepreneurs who wish to invest in the superstructure of the sector to accelerate Ghana's socio-economic development particularly in the area of job creation and rural development as a vehicle of rural integration (PNDC Law 116).

In 1987, the government adopted a National Tourism Policy (NTP) which focused on three different areas - inbound international tourism, regional tourism, and domestic tourism. One of the objectives of the NTP, according to Tuurosong (1999), was to develop tourism to become a major contributor to the economy, through job creation and foreign exchange generation. The NTP was to make tourism become the bedrock for the development and enhancement of Ghana's environment and heritage.

Tourism in Ghana was given another boost with the launch of the Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) of 1993 to 1995, which gave birth to the creation of the new Ministry of Tourism in March 1993. This development plan advocated the promotion of leisure and business travels. Leisure travel was promoted through cultural tourism, ecotourism and recreational tourism. Business tourism was nurtured and encouraged through conference tourism.

The seeds of tourism development sown between 1985 and 1995 bore fruits with phenomenal consequences. Arrivals in Ghana rose from 85,332 in 1985 to about 286,000 in 1995 and by 2010 the arrival figures stood at 931,224 (GTB, 2009). By 1995, the tourism sector had become the fourth highest foreign exchange earner. According to Tuurosong (1999) tourism's foreign exchange earnings were estimated to hit US$237 million by 2010, This target was really achieved beyond expectation. (Table 1).

Overwhelmed by these successes, the tourism ministry launched a 15-year tourism development plan spanning the period 1996-2010, known as the Integrated Tourism Development Plan (ITDP). The major achievement of the ITDP according to the then sector minister, was the creation of awareness through the educating of people in tourism. Also, the ITDP created such a strong domestic and international image for Ghana (MOT, 2009).

Through the promotion of cultural tourism, the cultural heritage of the diverse ethnic groups in Ghana is being revived and preserved. Craft villages have been established in various parts of the country like Bonwire, Ntonso, Anhwia all in the Ashanti region, Alavanyo in the Volta region and Daboya in the Northern region. The Ghanaian beads and other artifacts that have resurfaced on our market stalls all portray that sense of cultural revival through tourism. With such strides being made by tourism over the years, the ITDP's target of reaching one million arrivals and US$1.5 billion by 2010 might not have been over-ambitious (Tuurosong, 1999).

Ghana is being marketed internationally as the gate-way to Africa. It is rather unfortunate that the 'gate' is being choked by filth on our streets and human excreta at the beaches. Tourists also complain of high air fares by many of the airlines and expensive rent charges by the few quality hotels in the country (MOT, 1996). On major occasions like PANAFEST and EMANCIPATION DAY, hotels are usually well booked in advance such that some participants have to make do with less comfortable accommodation such as halls of residence of the universities.

Table 1: Ghana: International Tourist Arrivals and Receipts (2005-2010)

Year	Arrivals	Receipts (US$M)
2005	428,533	836.09
2006	497,129	986.80
2007	586,612	1,172.00
2008	698,069	1,403.10
2009	802,779	1,615.20
2010	931,224	1,875.00

Source: GTB, 2011

One advantage however, is that, airfares are tumbling down due to price war being fought by the major airlines in the country (GTB, 2011).

Economic Dimensions

The analysis of economic impacts of tourism in Ghana is currently concentrated on international tourism. Nonetheless, domestic tourism is also one aspect of the national tourism plan. However, the lack of data on domestic tourism has precluded the opportunity for analysis (MOT, 1996). The impact made by tourism on Ghana's economy can be seen in the areas of its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and infrastructural development. These include gross and net foreign exchange earnings, tourism employment,income multipliers, direct, indirect and induced employment as well as income generation.

There has been a steady growth in the number of tourist arrivals since the prioritisation of the sector in 1985. The figure which stood at 92,000 in 1986 increased in volume to 146,000 by 1990. By 1994 the figure was estimated to reach 271000, that is, almost thrice the level attained in 1986 and further to 931,224 in 2010. Table 1 shows that substantial growth rates were recorded for both arrivals and receipts between 2005 and 2010.

Statement of the Problem

The contribution of tour operators in tourism distribution at destinations the world over has been widely acknowledged in the literature (WTO, 1999; Richards, 2001; Cavlek, 2002). According to William and Richter (2002) an estimated 70 percent of international travellers from Europe use tour operators to assist them with long-haul travel activities. This excludes travellers visiting friends and relatives (VFR) who make their own travel arrangements.

It has been acknowledged in the literature that the rapid development of international tourism can be linked to the activities of travel intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agents. The success of many destinations as observed by Cavlek (2002) depends on their inclusion in the programmes of foreign tour operators.

These observations bear testimony to the fact that tour operators play a significant role in tourism's contribution to national economies elsewhere. With such contribution of tour operators as distribution channels in other countries there is the need to investigate the extent to which tour operators in Ghana contribute to the development of tourism in the country.

According to a GTB report, travel intermediaries (travel agents and tour operators) were the weakest link in Ghana's tourism industry. This is due to their low performance in the industry. Tour operators were particularly cited in the report to have existed only in name. The GTB report criticised tour operators of the time for merely dealing in air-ticketing and doing very little in organising excursions and tours. It went on to say that tour operators hardly stimulate in-coming tourism from generating markets (GTB, 1987). Perhaps the issue of tour operators and travel agents inability to organise tours and excursions as their counterparts in other African destinations such as South Africa, Kenya, and Tunisia could be the basis of such observation. Such revelation several years ago need to be investigated to find out the extent to which this phenomenon has changed or otherwise. The recounted thus far, raises critical questions that inform the present study.

Research Questions

The study was underpinned by the following research questions:

(i) What are the activities performed by tour operators in Ghana?

(ii) Under what type of ownership does the tour operator in Ghana function?

(iii) What contribution does the Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) make to the promotion of tourism in Ghana.

(iv) How do tour operators in Ghana market the country as a tourist destination?

(v) Which tourism products feature mostly in the promotion of international tourism by Ghana's tour operators?

(vi) How has the ICT impacted on the business of the tour operator in Ghana?

(vii) How many tours on the average do individual tour operators in Ghana organise annually?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective/purpose of the study was to assess the role played by tour operators in the development of tourism in Ghana.

Specifically, the study sought to:

i. identify activities undertaken by tour operators;
ii. ascertain the ownership structure of tour operators in Ghana;
iii. ascertain the contribution of the Tour Operators Union of Ghana to tourism
development in the country;
iv. explore the various means by which tour operators market Ghana as a tourist destination;
v. determine the tourism products featured mostly by tour operators in promoting tourism in Ghana; and

vi. assess the impact of information and communications technology (ICT) on the tour operator's business in Ghana.

Significance of the Study

The importance of understanding and managing the structure and behaviour of tourism distribution channels also known as travel intermediaries has been clearly identified in many mainstream academic and trade publications (Ryan, 1991; Duke & Persia, 1993; Holloway & Plant, 1998). Nonetheless, there has been relatively little tourism research attention focusing on travel intermediaries (Uysal, & Fasenmaier, 1993; Buhalis, 2000).

The Ghana Tourism Authority (formerly Ghana Tourist Board) observes that travel agents and tour operators in Ghana are not performing well in terms of organising excursions and tours both locally and internationally. They have resigned themselves into ticketing and reservation duties as compared to their counterparts in other tourist destinations. It is on record that significant number of foreign holiday travels in the European countries is organised through bookings with tour operators.

In some African tourist destinations such as Tunisia (where tourism is their number one foreign exchange earner), Kenya and South Africa, tour operators are involved not only in the organisation of tours both inside and outside their countries but also involve themselves in national issues.

In Kenya and South Africa, for instance, tour operators offer tours to neighbouring countries such as Namibia and Tanzania. While tour operators in South Africa are credited with the promotion of responsible tourism

(Spenceley, 2007), their counterparts in Kenya are found to be involved in pushing Kenya's sustainability agenda forward.

Even though the importance of an effective distribution system has been recognised by the Integrated Tourism Development Plan of Ghana (MOT, 1996) there has not been any focal study on the role tour operators play in Ghana's tourism development efforts. The very few studies on this subject in Ghana so far have concentrated on the broad area of travel intermediaries (Amuquandoh & Amenumey, 2008; Akyeampong, 2007).

Studies in other parts of the world focus mainly on tour operators' role in the travel distribution chain at destinations. Unlike other studies on travel intermediaries in Ghana, therefore, the rational behind this study is to undertake an exploratory exercise with a focus on tour operators' role as principals in the travel intermediary chain in Ghana's tourism industry to fill the void. An investigation such as the current study is just appropriate and justifiable to determine the role played by tour operators in Ghana to advance the developmental agenda of the country.

Limitations

There are a number of independent organisations who operate as travel intermediaries in Ghana's tourism industry. Most of these organisations style themselves as tour operators. This study, however, is limited to those tour operators who are duly recognised and registered by the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), most of whom operate under the umbrella of the Tour Operators' Union of Ghana (TOUGHA).

Organisation of the Thesis

This study is organized into ten chapters. Chapter one covers the introduction which outlines the background, philosophy, problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance and limitations of the study. The second chapter lookes at documentary issues related to the study while the third chapter considers conceptual frameworks and chapter four reviews literature on Information and Communications Technology and intermediation. Chapter five covers methodological issues while chapter six outlines respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Chapter seven focuses on analysis of the tour operator business in Ghana while chapter eight investigates the impact of Information and Communications Technology on tour operations in the country. Chapter nine examines the role of the tour operator intermediary in Ghana. The final chapter covers highlights of the study and draws conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

DOCUMENTATION ON TOURISM DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

Introduction

This chapter reviews related literature in the field of tourism distribution channels, referred to interchangeably as travel intermediaries. The review is considered under the following sub-headings: Philosophical issues, defining the concept of tourism distribution channel; needs functions of travel intermediaries; the distribution chain; historical perspectives of the tour operator industry; types of operators in the industry; and the tour operator travel intermediary function.

Philosophical Issues

Authorities such as Gartner and Bachri (1994) and Buhalis (2000) all agree that the philosophy behind travel intermediation is the creation of a link between the producers or suppliers of tourism services and their customers. This view has been corroborated by Alcazar Martinez (2002) who observes that distribution channels can be seen as a bridge between supply and demand, as that part of the marketing mix makes the product available to consumers. It also provides information and mechanism for consumers to pay for services. Bitner and Booms (1982), Welborn (1987), Middleton (1994) and Holloway et al (2009) share the same view as they maintain that the purpose of distribution channels is two-fold: to provide information for prospective tourists and intermediaries as well as establish a mechanism which would enable customers to make, contain and pay for reservations.

While Reiner (1990) contends that intermediation allows image creation, William and Richter (2002) hold the view that it provides the forum to communicate and sell products while Gartner and Bachri (1994) on their part maintain that intermediation provides expertise in the total packaging of tourism related services. This is not different from the claim by Pitt, Berthon and Berthon (1999) that intermediation allows for distribution cost minimization by routinising and standardizing transactions. They went further to state that it also allows for facilitation of the searching process by both buyer and seller. Intermediation gives room for the building of long-term relationship with regular customers.

It is not possible for individual suppliers to achieve this, except large hotel chains. There is also integrated offering and guarantee of capacity and obligation to deliver even when delays, flight cancellations and hotel over-booking are caused by external factors. Trade intermediaries have a far greater power to influence and to direct demand. In tourism, the position of the distribution sector is seen as being much stronger than their counterparts in other industries. In fact, they do control demand, and have increased bargaining power in their relations with suppliers of tourist services. They are also in a position to influence their marketing mix programmes (WTO, 1975).

In the view of Alderson (1958), cited in Wynne, Berthon, Leyland, Ewing and Napoli (2001) the purpose of a distribution channel is to make the right quantities of the right product or service available at the right place and at the right time. As a follow up, Wynne et al (2001) identified three essential purposes of distribution channels as: adjusting the discrepancy of assortments and thereby supporting economies of scope; routinising transactions to minimize the cost of distribution (a view shared by Pitt et al, 1999); and facilitating the search process of both producers and customers. These views conform to those of Kimes and Lord (1994) who maintain that wholesalers reduce information and transaction costs for the consumer, increase hotels' occupancy rates and reduce promotional expenses for hotels.

The international tourism industry is characterized by large numbers of small suppliers who are globally scattered. In Third World destinations, this situation is compounded by the secluded locations of many attractions, limited domestic markets and weak infrastructure. Likewise, tourists are numerous, diverse and geographically separated from the suppliers. Many live in different time zones. A vacation to Africa may well represent a large expense for the individual tourists; but each destination will only capture a small part of this as revenue (Wynne et al., 2001).

An overseas holiday to a particular destination is not a regular purchase for the tourist. It is thus difficult for each supplier to obtain information on each customer, except large hotel chains, but it is possible for an intermediary to build long-term relationships with its regular customers. In response to these challenges, the industry has developed a complex value chain, utilizing the services of several intermediaries which include destination service provider, the inbound tour operator, the outbound tour operator and the local travel agent.

Defining the Concept of Tourism Distribution Channels

Several scholars attempt to define the tourism distribution channel concept. Middleton (1994) proposes that a distribution channel is any organized and serviced system, created or utilised to provide convenient points of sale and/or access to consumers, away from the location of production and consumption, and paid for out of marketing budgets. However this definition ignores the promotional and marketing research activities undertaken by the channels, while underestimating their function of providing information. It also excludes local outlets, such as box offices or incoming travel agents at destinations.

Furthermore, McIntosh et al, (1995) cited in Mill and Morrison, 2009:351 defines tourism distribution channels as “an operating structure, system or linkages of various combinations of travel organization, through which a producer of travel products describes and confirms travel arrangements to the buyer”.This definition also fails to stress the promotional element, but highlighted the information provision function.

On their part, Coughlan et al (2006) and Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2003:483) define a distribution channel as a set of interdependent organisations involved in the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption by the consumer or business user. Quite simply, the purpose of a distribution channel is “to make the right quantities of the right product or service available at the right place and at the right time” (Wynne et al, 2001:425).

What makes a distribution strategy unique vis-a-vis other marketing mix divisions is that it depends almost entirely on physical location. The old saying among retailers is that the three keys to success are location, location and location. Alderson (1958) argued that intermediaries provide economies of distribution by increasing the efficiency of the process. He went on to say that they do this by creating time, place and possession utility and providing the right product, right place, and the right time. This view is shared by Coughlan et al (2006) who stated that channels should be viewed as an orchestrated network that creates value for the user(consumer) through the generation of form, possession, time, and place utilities.

Alderson maintained that intermediaries fulfil three basic functions. These were distilled by Coughlan et al (2006) into three essential purposes of distribution channels, a contention also subscribed to by Pitt et al, (1999). First, intermediaries support economies of scope as they adjust the discrepancy of assortments. Producers supply large quantities of a relatively small assortment of products or services, while customers require relatively small quantities of a large assortment of products and services. Through the process of exchange, intermediaries create possession utility, in addition to creating utilities of time and place.

Secondly, intermediaries routinise transactions so that the cost of distribution can be minimized. Because of this, transactions do not need to be bargained on individual basis, which would tend to be inefficient in most markets. Routinisation facilitates exchange as it leads to standardization and automation. Standardizing products and services enables comparison and assessment to be made. This in turn aids the production of the most highly valued items. By standardizing issues such as lot size, delivery frequency, payment and communication, a routine is created to make the exchange relationship between buyers and sellers both effective and efficient. In channels where it has been possible to automate activities, the costs of such task as reordering can be minimized. This is because an order is placed automatically when inventories reach a certain minimum level. In essence, automation involves machines or systems performing tasks previously performed by humans thereby eliminating errors and reducing labour costs.

Thirdly, intermediaries facilitate the searching process of both producers and customers by structuring the information essential to both parties. While sellers are searching for buyers, buyers are also searching for sellers; at the simplest level, intermediaries provide a place for these parties to find each other. Again producers are not sure about customers' needs while customers on the other hand are not sure their needs can be satisfied by producers. Intermediaries, therefore, reduce this uncertainty for both parties. In the case of tourism, the set of organisations may include a diverse array of providers and intermediaries such as wholesalers, inbound and outbound tour operators, retail travel agencies and destination marketing organisations (Buhalis & Laws, 2001; Alcazar Martinez, 2002).

It follows that a distribution system can be and in most instances is composed of more than one distribution channel, each of which operates parallel to and in competition with other channels. Perhaps more accurately, Wanhill (1998) suggests that "the principal role of intermediaries is to bring buyers and sellers together, either to create markets where they previously did not exist or to make existing markets work more efficiently and thereby to expand market size."The views expressed in this exposition are very relevant to this study as they clarify the scope of the concept of tourism distribution channel to direct the study.It also informs the study of what role should be expected of travel intermediaries in Ghana's tourism industry.

Needs Functions of Travel Intermediaries

In the words of Coughlan et al (2006) not only do marketing channels "satisfy demand" by supplying goods and services at the right place, the right quantity, the right quality and price but they also "stimulate demand" through the promotional activities of the various units. These include retailers, manufactures' representatives, sales offices, and wholesalers who constitute the marketing channels. Similarly, some researchers also recognise the role of marketing intermediaries in the distribution system.

Buhalis (2001) maintains that the primary distribution function for tourism is information, combination and travel arrangement services. He went on to assert that most distribution channels therefore provide information for prospective tourists, bundle tourism products together, and also establish mechanisms that enable consumers to make, confirm, and pay for reservations. Middleton and Clarke (2001), however, see the main functions of distribution as extending the number of points of sale or access away from the location at which services are performed or delivered and facilitating the purchase of products in advance of their production.

Sharing similar views Alcazar Martinez (2002:17) observes that the purpose of distribution is "to make the product available to the consumer in the quantity needed, at the time required and at the place where they want to obtain it". He further argues that distribution brings time, place, state and possession utility to the consumer, thereby facilitating sales. Some other researchers also see distribution as a means of adjusting supply and demand. This involves considerations of the cost, location, coverage of information dissemination, points of sale, provision of specialised knowledge, mechanisms for reservations and purchase, and the bundling of goods and services (Wahab et al,1976; Morrison, 1989; Middleton & Clarke, 2001; Kotler, 2003).

Alcazar Martinez (2002) stresses a number of distinguishing characteristics of the distribution of tourism. These include complementarity of service, the geographical distances between producers and consumers, and strong fluctuations in demand. Complementarity signifies the use of multiple and inter-related services while travelling, for example, transport and accommodation.

Moreover, within each sector a range of services may be used. The diverse range of services required generates the need for diverse information which may require multiple transactions. Efficient distribution channels can facilitate the provision of information while their bundling functions can reduce the number of transactions required and bring time, place, state and possession utility to the tourist. Issues of time and place utility are particularly important in terms of the distances which separate destinations and markets. Questions arise here as to where and when information needs to be made available, reservations made and transactions completed. Is it in the market, at the destination, or enroute? Alcazar Martinez (2002) notes that in sectors such as accommodation and transport, reservations and advance sales may be the norm while for many attractions the transactions will occur in situ prior to the service being used but he does not give any elaboration.

Giving emphasis to demand, Coughlan et al (2006) suggest that a useful starting point for considering a generalized model of distribution is the tourist, rather than the supplier or intermediary, which are the most common points of departure in the conventional structure of distribution models. To these researchers, beginning with the demand side is especially appropriate where the concern is not with the physical distribution of the product (as pertains in manufacturing which is the prime focus for distribution studies) but with facilitating the movement of tourists from their home region to the destinations where the consumption of goods and, especially, services essentially occurs "in situ".

Kotler et al (2003:413) also observes that "designing the distribution channel starts with determining the services that consumers in various target segments want". Consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the functions to be carried out in order to fulfil the tourist's distribution needs. Frazier (1999:235) asserts that "channel functions reflect the job tasks…….that must be performed within the distribution channel". In Frazier's view such functions represent the basic building blocks of any distribution channel. Channel functions have been variously depicted in the broader literature. In one of his seminal works, Lewis argues: "The purpose of a…'channel of distribution'…is to 'bridge the gap' between the producer of a product and the user of it" (Lewis, 1968:2). He identifies the functions or activities to achieve this bridging to include the transfer of title (buying and selling), the physical movement of goods, the search for markets or sources of supply, and the payment for goods.

In another early study Bucklin (1966) expresses the services provided by channels as reduction in lot size, delivery time and market decentralization. He further maintains that "the consumer determines the level of these services he requires". In general, 'the lower the level of services provided by the commercial institutions the greater the relative role of the consumer in the channel'. This important point according to Pearce (2008) does not only draw attention to the consumer but also to the likelihood that the role of different channel members, and thus channel structures will vary according to one's needs.

In this regard, Coughlan (2006) cited in Pearce (2008) asserts that while channel members can be eliminated or substituted, the functions they perform cannot be dispensed with but are shifted forward or backward in the channel and assumed by other members. They prefer the term *flow* to *function* as it is "somewhat more descriptive of movement along the channel". They identify eight "universal" flows: physical possession, ownership, promotion, negotiation, financing, risk ordering and payment. The direction of these flows may vary: the first three are typically forward (from producer to consumer), the next three move in both directions, while the final two are backward (from consumer to producer).

Drawing on these earlier concepts and principles of distribution, Pearce (2008) observes that the development of a generalized model of tourism distribution thus begins with a systematic analysis of the distribution needs of different tourist segments followed by consideration of the ways in which different channel members might perform the various functions required to meet them. These concepts and principles form the basis upon which the conceptual framework for the present study is constructed.

The Distribution Value Chain

Tourism channels have attracted a growing amount of attention in recent years because their importance has only recently been recognized by researchers (Pearce & Schott, 2005). According to Wahab, Crompton and Rothfield (1976) distribution can be seen as that part of the marketing mix that makes the product available to consumers. Gartner and Bachri (1994:164) however, see it as “the link between producers of tourism services and their customers” while Alcazar Martinez (2002) asserts that it is the bridge between supply and demand.

Other researchers have also identified the importance of tourism channels, also known as travel intermediaries. For example, McLellan and Noe (1976) identified tourism channels as gatekeepers of information since they provide information about destinations even if travellers do not choose to use their services. Hawkins and Hudman (1989) in their view contend that the distribution sector of tourism is much stronger and that travel intermediaries have far greater power to influence and effect consumer demand when compared to their counterparts in other industries. The various researchers seem to have varied ways of identifying the importance or value of travel distribution channels. Nonetheless, they all agree that the channels constitute a link between the suppliers of the tourism product and those who consume the product.

The tourism industry has developed a complex value chain utilizing the services of several intermediaries. In its simplest form according to Wynne, et al (2001) the chain members include the destination service provider, the domestic tour operator, the inbound tour operator, the outbound tour operator and the travel agent. This implies that even within the tour operator business set-up, which is the focus of this study, there are specialized roles.

The Domestic Tour Operator

Tour operators fulfil a number of roles. Not only are they concerned with carrying traffic out of the country (though this is the role mostly associated with them), they also exist to organize package holidays domestically, that is, to a destination within the country in which the tourists reside. These businesses, however, form a much smaller element of the travel and tourism industry, because it is relatively simple for tourists to make their own arrangements within their country (Holloway et al, 2009). It is comparatively rare today to find a tour operator who simultaneously organizes both domestic and foreign package holidays, although the originator of the package tour, Thomas Cook, started as domestic holiday organizer and later expanded into foreign destinations.

The In-Coming (In-Bound) Operator

Holloway et al (2009) and Wynne, et al (2001) recognize the existence of such specialised operators as the inbound tour operator (IBTO). In the view of Holloway, countries such as Spain and Greece which are predominantly destination countries rather than generating countries, have an in-coming travel sector that is as important as the out-going. Organisations specialising in handling in-coming holiday makers have a rather different role from that of outbound operators.

According to Holloway, some are merely ground handling agents, and their role may be limited to organizing hotel accommodation on behalf of an overseas tour operator, or greeting in-coming visitors and transporting them to their hotels. He went on to say that other companies, will however, offer a comprehensive range of services which may include negotiating with coach companies and hotels to secure the best of quotations for contracts, organizing special interest holidays or study tours, or providing dining or theatre arrangements. In some cases, companies specialize by the markets they serve, such as catering for the inbound Japanese or Israeli markets (Holloway et al, 2009).

Wynne et al (2001) on their part maintain that incoming operators constitute the first intermediaries in the value chain. They are also small and medium sized enterprises. This is a view shared by Holloway et al (2009). In the view of Wynne et al, a typical IBTO will specialize in a particular segment of the market and often a specific geographical region, as for example, adventure tours in South Africa. IBTOs, according to Wynne et al, (2001) add value to the industry through their expert knowledge of local destinations, customs and culture. In this way, they reduce search costs for other players in the value chain, and through regular use of certain destinations, they facilitate the routinisation of transactions between destinations and other players.

Finally, they facilitate re-assortment and sorting by packaging many activities into a single tour. An example of IBTO is an organisation that arranges golf tour around South Africa, or Springbok Atlas, which organises coach tours for groups of foreign tourists from destination to destination. Others arrange safari tours that allow visitors to spend time at several game parks rather than just one. Their activities are partly physical and partly information based.

IBTOs operate on the premise that tour groups in foreign countries do not have detailed knowledge of the local market and customs to make all the necessary arrangements. There is a need for tour groups to have an organisation in the host country to ensure that every thing runs smoothly and to whom they can turn to sort out unanticipated problems (Wynne et al, 2001). Significantly, this study is guided by these views since the focus is on tour operators in Ghana, a destination country with predominantly in-bound operators.

Out-Bound Tour Operators

Commenting on OBTOs, Wynne et al (2001) observed that they make up the second intermediary. A typical OBTO, they maintain, is based in a developed country and will offer packaged tours to many destination countries. These companies are usually strong in the marketing department where they are the largest player in the value chain. They are often the main source of promotional information for the prospective visitor as they publish brochures containing details and comparisons on all their destinations. They fulfil all the functions of the intermediary. In general, they do not make arrangements directly in the destination country, but will work through several local IBTOs, who will arrange tours on their behalf. By offering many different types of tours all over the world, they reduce the searching costs of the tourists. By arranging package tours, they routinise all the activities associated with booking a holiday and effectively fulfil the assorting function.

However, they do not cater for the independent traveller who wishes to simply arrive in a country and make his or her arrangements; or the business traveller, who usually bypasses the OBTO. OBTOs, in conjunction with IBTOs, usually use their combined expert knowledge to customise tours for more discerning groups of tourists, but will do so for a premium (Wynne et al, 2001). Examples of such OBTOs include Abercrombe Kent, Jagged Globe Mountaineering and Virgin Ski Holidays. Many of the larger travel agencies also, therefore, play the OBTO role. While OBTOs constitute the largest players in the value chain, it is not clear the extent to which this prevails in Ghana and the current study sought to investigate the issue.

Contributing to the existence of OBTOs, Wynne et al (2001) and Holloway et al (2009) note that many OBTOs, recognizing that their strengths can be in specialising in some particular aspect of operation, choose to specialize according to mode of transport by which their clients travel. While some OBTOs focus on air travel, others concentrate on coach transport while still others (especially those involved in providing camping holidays abroad) organize package holidays for their clients which enable them to use their own private cars, some even chose to specialise in holidays using railways. Ferry companies have also developed their own package tour programmes to promote sea travel (Wynne, 2001; Holloway et al, 2009).

Specialisation among tour operators can also be based on the markets they serve or the products they develop. The most common distinction is between the mass market operator on one hand, whose product- typically the sun, sea, and sand holiday is designed for a very broad segment of the market;

and on the other hand,the specialist operator who aims at a particular niche market (Holloway et al, 2001; Wynne, 2001).

Travel Agents

Travel agents who form part of the distribution value chain add value in several ways (Wynne, 2001). They are geographically close to the tourists and assist the customer by doing much of the searching on their behalf. Unlike the tour operators, they are better able to cater for the individual requirements of each tourist and customise a holiday to suit each client. According to Wynne et al travel agents are able to cater for independent travelers, business visitors, holiday-makers and tour groups. Through access to the booking systems, they routinise transactions and payments and coupled with their experience and expert knowledge of the industry, facilitate searching.

Travel agents are also aggregators in that they will stock the brochures of many OBTOs, so the customer can choose his or her particular holiday from a large number of different offerings. As the intermediary closest to the customer, they are usually in the best position to build relationships with customers and this is particularly true in the business travel market.

Reservation Systems

These are relatively new intermediaries in the global market. Known as computer reservation systems (CRS), they have evolved from the proprietary systems used by the major US airlines and travel agents to make flight bookings (e.g. SABRE). They are, however, increasingly expanding into other sectors. Destinations and final service providers constitute another component of the value chain (Wynne et al, 2001). These are the suppliers and producers of tourism products and services. They include hotel and Bed and Breakfast (B&B) operators, restaurants, safari lodges and game parks, theatres, museums, rafting operators, bus operators, airlines and car hire companies.

In broader terms, according to Wynne et al, these are defined as the organisations that manage the interactions and the experiences of individual tourists with each tourist attraction. Typically, final service providers are characterized by small and medium enterprises with little technological infrastructure, financial power or marketing expertise. They generally cater to only a few of the needs of a tourist's holiday and each only captures a small part of the revenue (Wynne et al, 2001).

Historical Perspectives of the Tour Operator Industry

A tour package is defined as the combination of components of a vacation (such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment and meals) which are sold to the customer as a single product at a single price. Tour packages differ in the items that are included. At one extreme, only accommodation and transportation are included, while at other extremes the package could include meals, entertainment, grand tours and gratuities (Sheldom 1986).

Mill and Morrison (2009) indicate that package tour or tour wholesaling began in the mid- nineteenth century by Thomas Cook in England. They also observe that the growth of the industry occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Sheldom (1986) the early package tours differed from those of today in that transportation was always by railroad while accommodation was not included. Instead, the traveller received a hotel coupon to use at any of 1,200 hotels throughout Europe, and the payment was guaranteed by Thomas Cook (Wright 1972) cited in Sheldom (1986).

The next development took place in the 1920s when steam engines became popular. The growth of the industry was limited by slow modes of transportation, high transportation costs and lack of traveller comfort. Poor communication also limited the information flow which was necessary for the efficient movement and accommodation of people. According to Sheldom (1986), the travel market was not large enough for tour operators to be profitable. It was not until after the Second World War that air travel could carry large numbers of people over long distances quickly, comfortably and inexpensively. Such development provided the volume of travellers to support the growth of the package tour industry into the large size that it is today. In Ghana, however, one major challenge facing tour operation is relative high air fares (MOT, 1996).

Supporting this view, Mill and Morrison (2009) contend that the increase in package tours resulted from the development of larger aircrafts capable of flying greater distances. They observe that the increased capacity led to lower airfares that stimulated demand for low- cost vacations. Although it is true that demand stimulates supply, it is also arguably possible for supply to stimulate demand. Mills and Morrison went on to say that to meet this demand tour wholesalers, also known as tour operators, entered the market place to put together low- cost vacation packages.

Types of Tour Operators

A number of different groups of tour operators can be identified, although not all necessarily exist in every country. These are: mass market operators, specialist operators, and tourism services.

Mass Market Operators

Considered as the widest known group, such operators not only sell large numbers of inclusive tours (ITs) as their description implies, but also, they often advertise widely in newspapers, magazines and on television. The largest of such operators concentrate their ITs on the most popular sun, sea and sand destinations, many of which they themselves have popularized by their activities and promotion. Some of them operate their own air or coach lines, or are owned by airlines, or work very closely with a particular carrier.

Specialist Operators

This group may not be as popular as the mass operators, but it consists of many more businesses which provide a range of inclusive tours. Operators in this group can range from travel agents who provide their own packages for relatively small numbers of "local" customers, to state owned organizations who specialise in tours of their countries by substantial numbers of people. In fact some of the latter could almost be called "specialist mass market operators".

Specialist operators in other instances are owned by carriers or accommodation businesses and their key function is to provide customers for the products of those businesses. Specialist operators can be categorized into various types, although some may fall into more than one. There are those who provide tours from specific areas of a country and who may be local travel agents or carrier, those who provide tours to specific destinations and who are frequently owned by or associated with the governments or businesses in the destination country. There are also those who use specific carriers for their tours and who are generally owned by the carriers concerned, and yet there are those who use specific accommodation for their tours and who in some cases may be owned by the accommodation businesses concerned. Finally, there are those who provide special interest or exotic tours.

Tourism Services

People need a whole range of tourism services when they travel. These services may include airline tickets, car rentals, places to stay, eat, and shop, tickets and admissions to attractions and also information about things to do and see. Services are the fastest growing industry in the world and tourism stands out as the fastest growing segment in the service industry (Cook, Yale & Marqua, 2006). People easily recognize where to purchase goods such as compact disks(CDs), textbooks and toothpaste.

However, the tourism industry, deals mainly with services, but not goods. It is sometimes difficult to describe these services, know where to purchase them, or even make clear distinctions between services and goods. These distinctions may even be blurred since some tourism organisations are involved primarily in the delivery of services while others deliver both services and goods (Cook et al, 2006).

At one end of the goods or services continuum are organisations like travel agencies, convention and visitor bureaus that primarily provide services. In the middle, are those organisations like restaurants that provide both goods and services. On the opposite end, you will find organisations like retail shops that provide primarily goods and some services.

Tourism is a service, yet services are often accompanied by something called a facilitating good. These are goods that are tangible items which they support or accompany the service being provided. For example, a call to the Ghana Tourism Authority Office in Accra enquiring about the type of documentations needed for travel into Ghana, the answers received would be a service. On the other hand if one requested brochures, then one would be receiving both a service and a facilitating good.

Services provided by the tourist offices and other tourism organisations are called “intangibles”. They are intangible because they cannot be placed in inventories and pulled out of warehouses or off shelves like a can of beans or a CD. Services are not only intangible but also they are highly perishable. Tourism services perish or lose their value with the passage of time just like fresh fruits and vegetables that eventually spoil and must be thrown away. Take for instance the airplane that has just left the gate, the cruise ship that has just been pushed away from the dock, or the fireworks show that marks the end of a concert. In each of the situations, the opportunity to generate revenue from the seat, cabin, or concert has disappeared forever (Cook et al, 2006).

The Tour Operator Travel Intermediary Function

In the view of McIntosh and Goeldner (1990), travel demand is a function of propensity and resistance. These two are inversely related in that as resistance component increases demand for travel to a particular destination decreases. Gartner and Bachri (1994) observe that economic distance, cultural distance and quality of host services constitute part of the resistance component of demand. For long haul international travel, these resistance factors should be operational. Information search behaviour for international travel, therefore, involves identification of the means to overcome resistance.

Tour operators are businesses that combine two or more travel services (e.g. transport, accommodation, catering, entertainment, sight-seeing) and sell them through travel agencies or directly to final consumers as a single product. A tour operator is thus a crucial link in the distribution chain, representing the central connection between customers and providers of tourism services. He or she therefore has the power to influence both the demand and the supply side (PPT Working paper, 2003). This view is shared by Holloway et al (2009) who contend that tour operators perform a distinct function in the tourism industry.They purchase separate elements of transport, accommodation and other services and combine these into a package which they then sell directly or indirectly to consumers.

On his part Sheldom (1986), agrees with this definition as he also indicates thatthe tour operator is a company which negotiates with hotels, transportation companies, and other suppliers and combines these vacation components into a package tour. According to her the tour operator then markets this package tour through the distribution system to the consumer. The tour operator, she argues,acts as an intermediary between the suppliers and the travel agent, or suppliers and the consumer.

According to Sheldom and Mak (1985), two main reasons can be assigned for the existence of tour operators. First, they increase occupancy or usage rates and reduce promotional costs for suppliers. Second, they reduce the cost of locating information on the destination to travel agents and customers. Transaction costs are also reduced since communications and bookings with many different suppliers are reduced to one(that is, with the tour operator). A return visitor who has more information about the destination is less likely to purchase a package tour (Sheldom & Mak, 1985).

Clerides, Nearchou, and Pashardes (2007) observe that the travel and tourism industry is characterised by a large degree of asymmetric information. Prospective tourists typically need to transact with agents such as hotels and car rental agencies who are located in far away destinations, often in foreign countries. They noted that it is difficult to assess the quality of the accommodation and the surrounding locality without first hand experience. This problem has promted many countries to establish national rating agencies whose task is to assess the quality of hotels in their jurisdiction and rate them according to a five-point star system. Private intermediaries such as tour operators at the same time, play a prominent role in this market.

Tour operators, according to Clerides et al, (2007), are firms that sell complete vacation packages. Their mode of operation entails three vital intermediary functions. First, tour operators collect objective information about alternative destinations and make it available on the internet or in brochures suitable for comparison shopping. Second, they provide subjective ratings of the different destinations based on both customer feedback and their own assessment of the facility. Third, tour operators bundle together transportation, accommodation and other services and sell them to consumers as a complete vacation package. Cleride et al (2007) maintain that bundling minimises transaction cost, (a view shared by other researchers such as Buhalis (2001), Middleton and Clarke, (2001) while pooling together tourists headed to the same destination exploits scale economics.

The 'gate-keeper' concept of tour operators is corroborated by Ioannides (1998) who also referred to tour operators as gate-keepers of tourism. He cited Britton (1991) who argued that these intermediaries are major players through their ability to shift tourist flows from one destination to another or one supplier to another through the travel products they construct and promote. Ioannides asserted that tour operators are able to easily substitute destinations in response to factors such as changing consumer tastes at the origin, or declining environmental conditions at the destination. He contended, therefore, that the fortune of individual destinations can depend heavily on decisions and actions of a select few tour operating companies in key countries.

Ioannides (1998) then went on to discuss general factors that influence tour operator behaviour when choosing new products and/ or destinations. These include price, accessibility, and adequate supply of suitable facilities, as well as political and economic stability. It is, however, argued that the survey results presented by Ioannides are of specialist US tour operators who cannot easily substitute their destinations as their entire business depends on specialized tours to a narrow range of destinations.

Developing countries are said to depend on foreign tour operators for obvious reasons such as expertise, knowledge of international market, producers and wholesalers of tourism related services. Morrison (1989) argues that since tourism products are experiential and consumed on site, tour operators are an integral link in the distribution system. They play important role in creating the images of destinations and in such capacity they can significantly influence international tourism flow towards a country hit by safety and security risks.

The attitudes of tour operators towards a particular destination can influence the decisions of individual tourists on where to spend a holiday. They further maintain that although destination images and decisions of travellers are influenced by several factors, tour operators and/or travel agents have been suggested as significant information sources and distribution channels who influence the images and decisions of travellers (Woodsite & Lysonski, 1989; Goodall, 1990; Gartner,1993).

Lending credence to the view of Baloghi and Mangaloghi, (1999) maintain that tour operators and travel agents have multiple and critical functions in destination marketing efforts They provide information to potential travellers and develop and promote destination image packages. In either case, they argued, destination images held by tour operators and travel agents are more likely to influence these vital processes for a tourist destination. Lawton and Page (1997) held a similar view when they suggested that because travel agents are opinion formers for their clients, their images and knowledge about destinations will have significant impact on potential travellers' vacation decision-making process.

In their contribution, Holloway et al (2009) maintain that tour operators are sometimes classed as wholesalers, in the sense that they purchase services; and break bulk (i.e. buy in large quantities in order to sell in smaller quantities). He observed, however, that wholesalers do not normally change the product they buy before distributing it, and for this reason some argue for an operator to be classed as a "principal", or supplier, rather than a traditional "middleman". This argument is based on the premise that by packaging a series of individual tourism products into a single whole new product, the "inclusive tour", the operator is actually changing the nature of these products.

Even though it is arguable that the customers could well put together the same package themselves, they could not do that at the same prices. The service which the tour operator provides is to buy in bulk and thus secure considerable discounts from the suppliers, which could not normally be matched by the customer buying direct. The operator is then able to assemble and present to the customer a package,the "inclusive tour"which is convenient to purchase and competitively priced.

Commenting on the structure and perspective of the European Tour Operator industry, Gartner and Bachri (1994), cited in William and Richter, (2002), emphasize the importance of tour operator intermediaries to aboriginal destinations. This they stress is largely related to their expertise and ability as producers and distributors of tourism related services, their knowledge of the international market, and their access to the relevant complementary services whereby a total package of tourism related services can be provided.

Again the seminal observations of Wahab et al (1976) are instructive and highlight the need for a more integrated approach. For instance, while the successful travel agent satisfies his own clients by selling them, what they need, the tour operator is not in the business of developing travel destinations but instead, in the business of developing tours to destinations that will sell. The responsibility of creating the interest in a destination that can lead to a trip is that of the destination tourism organization and not to the travel trade. It is clear from the literature that while individual channel members may play specific roles, the nature and weight of which may vary from one contest to another, the critical issue is that these various roles are interrelated. Therefore, as long as they strengthen their advice-giving capacity, tour operators will remain secure in the chain of distribution (Bennet, 1993).

Ancillary Service Providers and the Tour Operator

The fact that a distribution channel is a combination of intermediaries who together make a product or service available to the consumer has been recognised by a number of researchers (WTO,1975; Wynne et al, 2001; Kotler, 2003; Coughlan et al, 2006). WTO observes that a distribution channel is a combination of intermediaries who co-operate in the sale of a product while Coughlan et al and Kotler see a distribution channel as a set of interdependent organisations involved in the process of making a product or service available for consumption by the business user or consumer.

Coughlan et al (2006) again view a distribution channel as an orchestrated network that creates value for the consumer by generating form, possession, time and place utilities. Wynne, et al (2001) assert that the tourism industry has developed a complex value chain utilising the services of several intermediaries.

In the words of Holloway et al (2009), there is yet no term which will conveniently embrace all the mediators whose function it is to shepherd, guide, inform and interpret for groups of tourists. The functions of these ancillary service providers can also not be linked to one particular sector of the industry. While some are employed by carriers (such as airlines) and tour operators others work independently, or provide their services freelance to companies in the industry.

Couriers

"In an industry which is becoming increasingly more impersonal, as companies grow in size and tourism products themselves become homogeneous, the role of those who interface with the tourists becomes more and more important"(Holloway et al, 2009:251). Couriers are employed by coach companies or tour operators to supervise and shepherd groups of tourists participating in tours. They may also be known as tour escorts, tour leaders, tour managers or tour directors. One of the functions of a courier is to offer a sight-seeing commentary on the country or region through which they are travelling, and to act as a source of information.

Tour Guide

Unlike couriers, tour guides emphasise their information-giving role, even though they may also perform shepherding functions in their job. Tour guides (also known as tour lecturers) are retained by operators for their expertise in general or specialist subjects (Holloway et al, 2009). Like the couriers, the job of the guide is generally freelance and intermittent, off season jobs being harder to come by outside the large cities. Guides take pride in their professionalism, and have well-established regional and national bodies to represent their interests.

In advanced countries like the UK, tour guides are required to obtain some recognised qualifications through formal courses of varying length, validated by the respective regional tourist boards for guiding. In other European countries, such qualification is often seen as vital if a guide is to be given the licence to operate (Holloway et al ,2009). In France, for example, one is employed to guide in Paris, after having demonstrated local knowledge in formally approved qualifications (although such qualifications can also be obtained by other European Union member countries' guides).

Nonetheless, Holloway et al (2009) observes that obtaining registered guide status does not, of course, guarantee job security and many coach operators continue to employ non-registered guides who accept lower fees for their services. The 'added value' of a qualified guide is still seen by many employers as a luxury they cannot afford in a climate where cutting costs to achieve sales is imperative.

The Animateur

The term 'animateur' has become more popular in the British tourism industry. It applies to members of the industry who entertain tourists. They do this by either acting out a role, or providing entertainment or instruction. The English term is 'entertainer'. Animateur, a French term, covers those whose task is to interact with tourists to ensure that they enjoy themselves. In Disney's theme parks there are a variety of animateur roles. The best known animateur roles personifying Micky Misney characters are found on site, dressed as Alice in Wonderland, Snow white, even the Chipmunks (Holloway et al, 2009).

Financial Service Providers

Holloway et al (2009) identifies three financial services rendered to the tourist by financial service providers. These are insurance, foreign exchange and audit. In some cases it is obligatory for a tourist to travel under insurance cover. The coverage embraces one or more of the following contingencies: medical care and hospitalisation, repatriation, personal accident, cancellation or curtailment of holiday, delayed departure, baggage loss or delay, money loss and personal liability (Holloway et al, 2009). He further maintains that insurance, generally, remains a lucrative business for both operators and agents even though claims are said to be rising in recent times.

Foreign transactions enable tourists to pay for services and goods while abroad. There are options open to tourists which include taking bank notes with them, taking travellers cheques in sterling, dollar or any foreign currency, arranging for the advance transfer of funds to a specified foreign bank, or for an open credit and using credit cards and travel vouchers. In addition, personal cheques can be cashed against a cash card. Travellers cheques are the most widely used since they are readily accepted by banks throughout the world and other commercial institutions. Travellers' cheque offers the holder guaranteed security with rapid compensation for theft or loss. Credit cards such as those of Visa and MasterCard/Euro card can be used to purchase goods and services overseas, or to obtain cash advances.

Incentive Travel Vouchers

Tour companies use the incentive travel voucher to provide their employees or dealers with attractive travel packages as rewards for their achievements (Cook et al, 2006; Holloway et al, 2009). It is seen as another monetary reward for achievement but in the words of Holloway, the appeal of travel has proved to be a stronger motivator than cash or consumer durables.

Duty-Free Shopping Centres

Duty-free shopping facilities fall within the category of services provided for tourists to facilitate their movements. The purchase of duty-free goods at airports, on board ships, and aircrafts, or at specially designated duty-free ports has always exerted a strong attraction for tourists (Holloway et al, 2009; Mill & Morrison 2009).

Collaboration in Intermediary Practices

The process of integration that has taken place between sectors of the tourism industry in developed countries has been observed by Holloway et al (2009). The linkage between tour operators and other tourism service providers such as airlines, cruise lines, hotels, resorts, and car rental companies has also been highlighted by Cook et al, (2006). According to Holloway et al (2009), in Britain and other European countries tour operators' integration is manifested by those who have sought to maintain control over their transport supply in particular, through direct ownership of an airline.

Specialisation in Tour Operations

Specialisation in tour operations has been highlighted in the literature. Many tour operators recognise that their strength lies in specializing in some particular aspect of operation. There are various options open to the tour operator to specialize. For instance, some out bound operators choose to specialise according to the mode of transport by which their clients will travel. Among the travel modes are air travel, coach, railway and ferry transports. (Holloway et al, 2009). This view is shared by Mill and Morrison (2009) who also mention some areas of specialisation such as tour offerings by target market, distinction, mode of transportation, type of activity and special interest.

Specialisation among tour operators can also be based on the markets they serve or the products they develop. Most commonly, the distinction is between mass market on one side whose products are typically "the sun, sea, sand" holiday designed to appeal to a broad segment of the market; and on the specialist operator who aims at a particular niche market.

A study by Withers (1995) reported that Ghana is primarily a business destination. The business market he emphasized comprises individual business travellers and persons attending conferences and meetings. The leisure market has also been recognised in the study as a force to reckon with. Ghanaians visiting friends and relatives (VFR) come in large numbers on holidays. According to GTA, over 192,000 such overseas Ghanaians returning home on visits was recorded in 2009 (GTA, 2011).

Assumptions

Following the review of related literature a number of assumptions have been made in relation to the current study. It is assumed that:

- Tour operators in Ghana make the tourist product or service available for use or consumption by the consumer or user.
- Tour operators in Ghana play the intermediary role of providing economies of distribution by increasing the efficiency of the process.
- The distribution functions for tourism undertaken by Ghana's tour operators are primarily information, combination and travel arrangement services.
- Ghana's tour operators fall within the following three categories- Domestic tour operators, in-coming (in-bound) operators and out-bound tour operators.
- The tour operator in Ghana is a crucial link in the distribution chain, representing the central connection between customers and providers of tourism services with the power to influence both the demand and the supply side.
- Ghana's tour operators negotiate with hotels, transportation companies, and other suppliers and combine these vacation components into a package tour..
- Ghana's tour operators "shift tourist flows from one destination to another or one supplier to another through the travel products they construct and promote", for which they can be described as "gatekeepers of tourism" in Ghana.

- Tour operators in Ghana are merely ground handling agents whose role may be limited to organizing hotel accommodation on behalf of an overseas tour operator or greeting in-coming visitors and transporting them to their hotels.
- In Ghana the distribution system in most instances is composed of more than one distribution channel, each of which operates parallel to and in competition with other channels.

Summary

The chapter discussed related literature in line with the objectives of the study. Issues considered included: philosophical issues which concerns the underlying principles behind travel intermediation. The definition of tourism distribution channels was also covered and this explained what tourism distribution channel was all about. The chapter also discussed needs functions of travel intermediaries which explained functions performed by travel intermediaries to meet the needs of travellers.

The historical perspective of the tour operator industry was discussed and this looked at the develpoment of the tour operation industry. The tourism distribution value chain was covered which discussed the various agents involved in the distribution chain. Finally, the chapter also covered the intermediary function of the tour operator and this concerned the role of the tour operator as an intermediary. The next chapter looks at the conceptual frameworks relating to the study.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS INFLUENCING TRAVEL INTERMEDIARIES' OPERATION

Introduction

This chapter examines various models relating to the on-going study. These models include the Needs-Function model of tourism distribution; the Place of the tour operator in the tourism distribution system; Structure of the US travel intermediation and finally, distribution functions for packaged tours which was chosen as the framework to guide and inform the research.

The Research Model

An effective way of achieving synthesis and providing a systematic basis upon which practical guide-lines might be built is to derive a model. Models might be thought of in various ways, yet the definition proposed by Haggett and Chorley is particularly pertinent in this context. In their view, a model is "a simplified structuring of reality which presents supposedly significant features or relationships in a generalized form" (Haggett & Chorley, 1967: 22). On the part of Miles and Huberman (1994) models and designs are used interchangeably with conceptual frameworks. To them a conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form the main things to be studied. Based on these assertions the current study reviewed four models on travel distribution out of which one has been adopted.

The Needs- Functions Model of Tourism Distribution

The Needs-Functions Model of Tourism Distribution is a generalized framework which emphasizes the needs of tourists and the functions required to fulfil those needs (Pearce, 2008). More explicit identification of the significant features of tourism distribution and structuring of the relevant relationships in a generalized form enhance the conceptual understanding of the complex phenomenon, thereby assisting scholars in this field. Such a model makes a timely contribution to the literature of tourism distribution and distribution in general (Pearce, 2007).

Tourism distribution is a far from mature field of study. While the seminal work might be traced back to Wahab, et al (1976) and other studies that appeared intermittently in the 1980s (Bitner & Booms, 1982; Buckley, 1987), it is only in the past decade that more sustained attention has been given to tourism distribution, including the publication of several books (O'Connor, 1999; Buhalis & Laws, 2001; Alcazar Martinez, 2002)

Various structural diagrams of distribution systems have been presented outlining the linkages between providers and consumers of tourism products. These are generally used to illustrate broader discussions of distribution (Wahab et al, 1976; Buhalis, 2001; Laws, 2001; Midddleton & Clarke, 2001; Alcazar Martinez, 2002). They are also used to depict the channel structures linking particular markets and destinations (March, 1997; King & Choi, 1999; Pan & Laws 2002, Yamamoto & Gill, 2002). Again, they are used to provide background and emergence of new online systems (Reinder & Baker, 1998; O' connor, 1999; Wynne et al, 2001; Hudson & Lang, 2002; Pavlides, 2006).

Typically, the distribution models depict the links outward from the suppliers to the consumers, either directly or via a set of intermediaries, the arrows are almost invariably unidirectional and do not reflect the underlying nature of linkages. The suppliers and consumers are generally not disaggregated, for example by sector or market segment, rather, the emphasis is on differentiating between levels and types of intermediaries. Most are contextualized in terms of packaged travel, reflecting their setting in either Europe or emerging Asian markets, little attention has been given to independent tourists.

Pearce (2008) contends that there is often little attempt to go beyond a description of the general or empirically derived structural diagrams and introduce or interpret these from a more theoretical basis. In most cases the discussion is limited to an outline of the functions of distribution followed by an account of the way in which various intermediaries perform these. According to Buhalis (2001:8):“the primary distribution functions for tourism are information, combination and travel arrangement services. Most distribution channels therefore provide information for prospective tourists, bundle tourism products together and also establish mechanisms that enable consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations”.

Middleton and Clarke (2001), on their part, see the main functions of distribution as extending the number of points of sale or access away from the location at which services are performed or delivered and facilitating the purchase of products in advance of their production. To Pearce (2008) a considerable scope exists to develop a stronger conceptual basis to the study of tourism distribution as evidenced by the work of a few researchers such as

Yamamoto and Gill (2002) who employed the concept of production systems in their work on the distribution of Japanese Ski packages to Whistler in Canada. The needs- function model is one way of developing a stronger conceptual basis to the study of tourism distribution.

On this basis, the first set of “significant features or relationships might be simplified and structured as in Figure 1. The vertical axis depicts the nature of demand segmented by type of travel and major sector while the interrelated utilities and functions of distribution are shown in the horizontal axis. (See Fig.1).

Tourism demand is not homogeneous; tourists can be segmented in a variety of ways. The focus around the world is on international leisure tourists. The empirical work suggests that segmenting them according to the way in which they travel and make their travel arrangements is particularly pertinent in terms of distribution. For the purpose of model building, three basic segments might be identified: independent, customized and package tourists. In practice, the boundaries between these segments are graduated rather than sharp and distinct. It is possible to have different degrees of customization and various types of packages.

Tourists demand three categories of services: transportation, accommodation and attractions and activities. Each of these might be further sub- divided, for example different modes of transport and transport to or within a destination (Pearce, 2003).Provision of adequate information to tourists in the right place and time is crucial to the whole process, both to stimulate demand and to facilitate the booking and purchase of products and services. The type and amount of information required by different segments about various products and services and when these are needed are different.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="12">Time, Place, Form and Possession Utilities
Timing and Location of Services Required</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">In market</td><td colspan="4">En route</td><td colspan="4">At destination</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Segment</td><td>Information provision</td><td>Assortment</td><td>Bundling</td><td>Booking and purchase</td><td>Information provision</td><td>Assortment</td><td>Bundling</td><td>Booking and purchase</td><td>Information provision</td><td>Assortment</td><td>Bundling</td><td>Booking and purchase</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="14">Independent</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Sector</td><td>Transport to</td><td>Spec</td><td>Full</td><td rowspan="4">None</td><td>Key trans</td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Transport at</td><td rowspan="3">General and specific</td><td rowspan="3">Some</td><td rowspan="3">Few Transactions</td><td rowspan="3">General and specific</td><td rowspan="3">Some</td><td rowspan="3">Little or none</td><td rowspan="3">Some transactions</td><td rowspan="3">Specific</td><td rowspan="3">Full range/some sorting</td><td rowspan="3">Little or none</td><td rowspan="3">Multiple transactions</td></tr>
<tr><td>Accommodation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Attractions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="14">Customized</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Sector</td><td>Transport to</td><td rowspan="4">General and specific</td><td>Full</td><td rowspan="4">Customized bundling of major products</td><td rowspan="4">Single transaction</td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Transport at</td><td rowspan="3">Wider assortment</td><td rowspan="3">General and specific</td><td rowspan="3">Some</td><td rowspan="3">Little</td><td rowspan="3">Few transactions</td><td rowspan="3">Specific</td><td rowspan="3">Full range/some sorting</td><td rowspan="3">Little or none</td><td rowspan="2">Some trans</td></tr>
<tr><td>Accommodation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Attractions</td><td>Some trans</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="14">Package</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Sector</td><td>Transport to</td><td rowspan="4">General and specific</td><td rowspan="4">Range of standardize packages</td><td rowspan="4">All inclusive</td><td rowspan="4">Single transaction</td><td colspan="4" rowspan="4"></td><td colspan="4" rowspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Transport at</td></tr>
<tr><td>Accommodation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Attractions</td><td>Some</td><td>Limited/ optional</td><td>Possibly</td><td>Optional</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 1: Needs-Function Model of Tourism Distribution

Source: Adopted from Pearce (2008).

In the case of tourism, which essentially involves a multi- service experience, form utility might be considered in terms of whether any particular service is sought and utilized by itself, as for instance, a seat in a coach, a room in a hotel, or a bungy jump. Also, whether various services are, in the words of Buhalis (2001) "bundled" together as in an all-inclusive package tour. It can also be a set of customized travel arrangements encompassing transport, accommodation, attractions and activities or some combination of these. Form utility is thus related to assortment and sorting, that is, bridging the discrepancy between the assortment or range and quantity of goods and services provided by suppliers and those demanded by tourists.

Possession utility can likewise be seen in terms of booking and purchase: when and where does the tourist need to book and pay for which services, which services require reservations and pre- payment; how are the transactions completed and by whom? The transfer of title (as a plane ticket or hotel voucher) becomes especially important given that tourism is essentially about the movement of tourists rather than products.

The model serves as a framework by which the distribution needs of the different segments can be examined. It highlights the differences that occur among segments, sectors, and the amount of distribution activity that occurs in the market and at the destination. In terms of time and place utilities, the most pronounced differences are found at the extremes of the bottom left to upper right diagonal, that is between the in- market and at destination needs of the independent and package tourists. Form and possession utilities among the three segments are also marked, the customized tourists exhibit particular characteristics which have hitherto been generally neglected in the literature in favour of package tourists and, to a lesser extent, independent tourist (Pearce 2008).

Package tourists, which is the focus of this study, are distinguished by their purchase of all inclusive tours in which all their components have been bundled together as a single product and sold in a single transaction in the market. These are commonly sold as group series tours, but a variety of individual packages is also available (Pearce & Schott, 2005). Information about the destination might have been gleaned from a variety of sources, but the choice of the package will be largely based on information provided in a tour operator's or wholesaler's catalogue or brochure. While different types of packages might be offered, particularly with regard to cost and the level of service, there is a high degree of standardization of the component parts (such as accommodation or attractions included).

Independent tourists show marked contrasts on all these dimensions. They favour choice, flexibility, and spontaneity, arrange all or the majority of their own travel/stay independently of market-based intermediaries and make a series of bookings and purchases, often but not always directly from the providers at the destination or destinations (Pearce & Schott, 2005). This behaviour is generally information intensive, little or no bundling occurs, and destination based distribution may predominate over pre- trip activity in the market.

Customized tourists constitute an intermediate segment and may be individuals or groups. They are distinguished from independent ones by the extent of pre-purchase made from an intermediary (usually in-market) and from package tourists by the fact that the combination of products they are seeking and paying for a single transaction prior to departure is tailor-made to meet their requirements rather than that already bundled into an existing package or series tour. In terms of assortment this latter feature means that they are seeking a wider range of products than are made available in the standard package (Pearce et al 2004, 2007). This is especially so in the case of individuals who, unlike groups, are not constrained by size and consequently may be seeking a more diverse range of accommodation (such as bed and breakfasts or lodges rather than hotels), transport (typically groups internally by coaches) and attractions and activities of personal appeal.

Pre-purchase of customized tours may, however be appealing, since it offers flexibility, provides a large measure of assurance both in terms of the cost, knowledge and advice provided by the intermediary. It also reduces the information search and transactional efforts of the consumers. These features may be particularly important where a relatively expensive long-and medium-haul, “once in a lifetime” trip is involved (Pearce et al 2007). This may also be true in emerging markets where tourists have little prior tourism experience (Sharda & Pearce, 2006) or where language and cultural differences are pronounced (Taniguchi 2006). Special interest tourists, especially those travelling in groups may also call upon knowledgeable intermediaries to customize their trips, though some may also do this independently (like fishermen and birdwatchers) (Stuart, Pearce & Weaver, 2005; Pearce et al 2007).

The model highlights the differing distribution needs of the three segments and contrasts the higher levels of service sought by the package and customized tourists. These are bundling, reduction of transactions, advance purchase, market decentralization, and the lesser, or at least, different demands of independent tourists. These tourists tend to assume more of the key functions themselves (i.e. they may combine the mix of products they need through a series of transactions) and do not require all functions to be performed in the market.

The patterns shown in Figure 1 have major implications for suppliers and for that matter the intermediaries in Ghana's tourism industry. The patterns underline the crucial role of the segments being served or targeted by these intermediaries. They also show the influence this has in the inter-related issues of where and when a supplier's products are to be distributed and also whether these products are to be combined with other services or sold separately. Since package tourists are part of the Ghanaian intermediaries' market mix, then there is the need for a mechanism by which a particular product will be combined with others to constitute the package, along with advance distribution in the market. Whatever the sector or region, this invariably means distribution via one or more intermediaries, as someone has to put the packages together and make them available in the market.

The same can be said of customized tourists: for a supplier's product to be part of an assortment available and arranged in the market by a third party, indirect distribution by intermediated channels is required. The issue now is to investigate the extent to which the Ghanaian intermediaries (i.e. suppliers) serving independent tourists distribute their products in-market; bundle them with those of other suppliers and do direct booking and purchase. The degree of information provided by other parties also needs to be investigated. As most suppliers are not dependent on a single segment, the use of multiple channels to reach their customers is common practice which results in complex distribution systems (Pearce, 2008). The extent to which this can be said of Ghana's tour operator is an issue worth investigating.

The Place of the Tour Operator in the Distribution System

In the view of Holloway et al (2009) tour operators perform a distinct function in the tourism industry. They purchase separate elements of transport, accommodation and other services, and combine them into a package which they then sell directly or indirectly to consumers. Their position in the market is demonstrated in Figure 2.

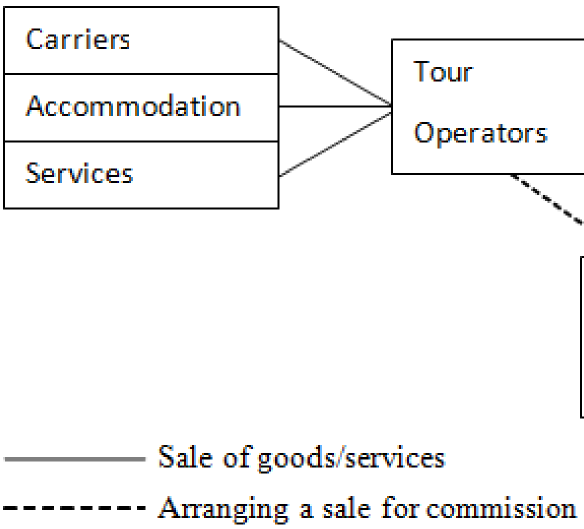

Figure 2. The Place of the Tour Operator in the Tourism Distribution System

Source: Holloway, et al (2009)

Tour operators are sometimes referred to as wholesalers, in the sense that they purchase services, and break bulk (i.e. buy in large quantities in order to sell in smaller quantities). However, wholesalers do not normally change the product they buy before distributing it, and it is for this reason that some argue for an operator to be classed as a principal or supplier, rather than the traditional 'middlemen,' This is based on the premise that by packaging a series of individual tourism products into a single whole new product which is the inclusive tour, the operator is actually changing the nature of those products. The service provided by the tour operator is to buy in bulk and thus secure considerable discounts from the suppliers, which normally could not be matched by the customer buying direct. The operator is able, therefore, to assemble and present to the consumer a package-the "inclusive tour"-which is both convenient to purchase and competitively priced. Even though it is possible for the customers to well put together the same package themselves, they could not do that at the same prices.

Structure of Travel Intermediation

The tour operator (wholesaler) puts a tour and all its components together and sells the tour as a package through his or her own company, retail outlets, and/or through approved retail travel agencies. Tour operators can offer vacation packages to the travelling public at prices lower than what an individual traveller can arrange. The independent tour operator provides sufficient revenue to transportation and ground service suppliers. They also provide the retailer and the general public with a wide selection of tours to a large number of destinations at varying costs for varying durations and in various seasons. One other important role played by the operator is that he supplies advance notice and increased assurance of future passenger volumes to suppliers. (See Figure 3).

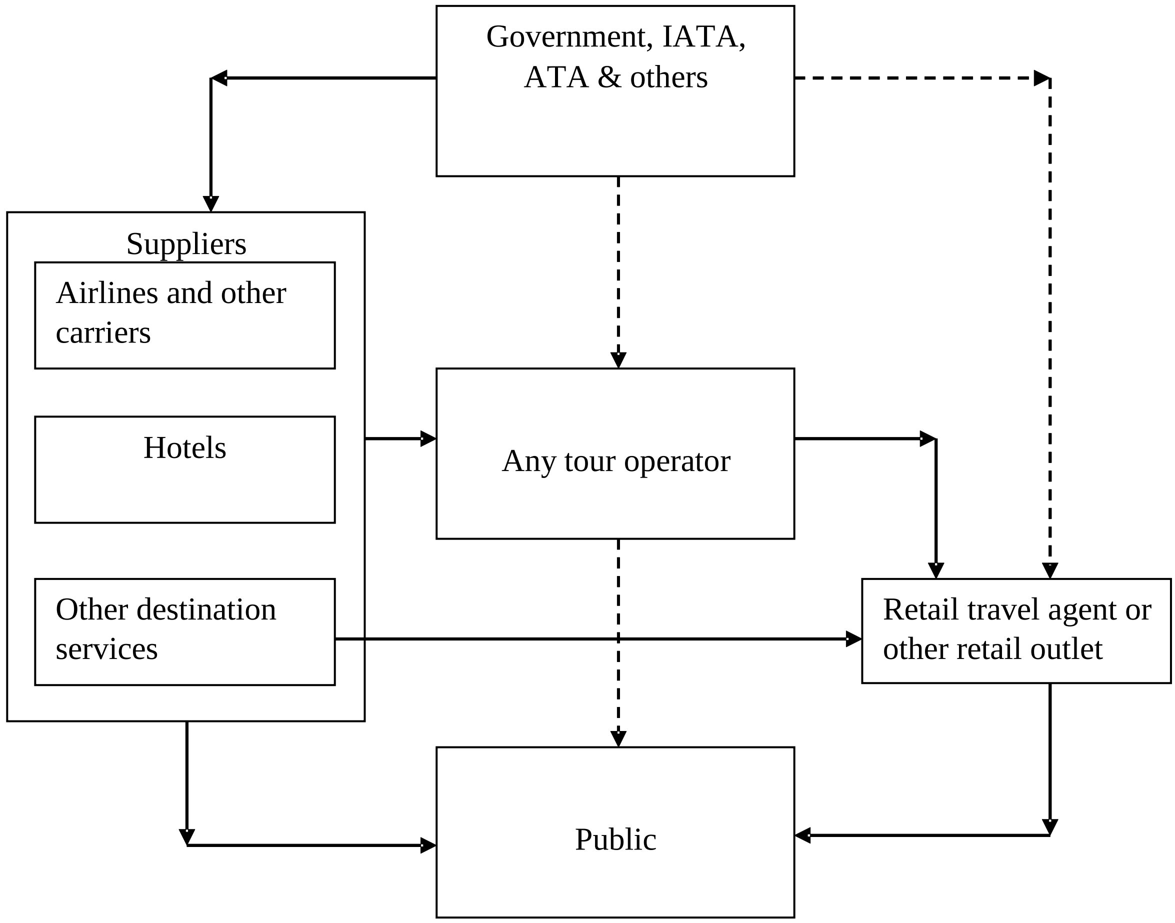

Figure 3: Structure of Travel Intermediation

Source: Goeldner et al (2009)

The position of the tour operator in the basic structure of the travel industry is shown in Figure 3. Suppliers of tourist products include the government and travel associations such as International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Association of Travel Associations (ATA). The tour operators obtain these products either directly from the government and associations or through other suppliers.

The public or consumer is the driving force who can purchase travel services from a retail travel agent or directly from the suppliers of travel services: the airlines, hotels, and other providers of destination services. The tour operator's (wholesaler's) role is that of consolidating the services of airlines and other carriers with the ground services needed into one package, which can be sold through travel agents to the consuming public.

The significant role played by tour operators in national economics has been highlighted by Goeldner et al (2009)who support their argument with statistical figures. According to these researchers, in 1996 alone, the direct impact of the group tour industry on North America was estimated to be US$11.6 billion. This figure included an estimate of all expenditures by tour operators, which were both directly related to the tours they operate and for other transportation expenses. Also included was the expenditures made by tour travellers while travelling. Most of the impact as opined by Goeldner et al was on the United States, with US$ 9.6 billion in estimated direct impact in 1996. The impact of the tour industry on Canada was US$2.6 billion.

The model is simple and straight-forward. It espouses the position of the tour operator in the travel intermediation role. Such findings significantly inform the current study which is investigating the role of tour operators in Ghana's tourism development. The exposition provide ample justification for such an exercise. The tour operator in Ghana is expected to assemble travel products from various suppliers and offer them as a package to the travelling public.

Critique of Models

The Needs-Functions model of tourism distribution (Figure 1) which focuses on international leisure tourists suggests segmentation of the tourists according to the way in which they travel and make their travel arrangements. The model serves as a framework by which the distribution needs of the different segments can be examined. The model, however, fails to discuss extensively the role played by the tour operator in the distribution chain. The emphasis is on general distribution functions.

The second model, “The place of the tour operator in the tourism distribution system” (Figure 2),. shows asymmetrical approach to tourism distribution. This is the case of most research within the tourism distribution literature. Recent books show that studies have largely focused on issues from supply-side perspective; the emphasis has been given to the suppliers and intermediaries (e.g.Travel Agents, Inbound and Outbound Tour Operators, and Tour Wholesalers), and relationships between these and their efforts to reach consumers (O’connor 1999; Buhalis & Laws 2001; Alcazar Martinez, 2002). Even though the model mentions the tour operator’s place in the distribution system, it rather fails to recognise the role of the consumer in the distribution link.

The third model, “Structure of travel intermediation” (Figure 3) clearly outlines the distribution function of travel services undertaken by travel intermediaries. It shows the position of the tour operator, travel agent, the various travel service sectors and the public as well as the linkages. The model also highlights the routinisation of service provision among the various members of the distribution channel. However, like model 2, the model fell short of recognising the role of the consumer in the distribution chain. This is indicated by the asymmetrical direction of the arrows, emphasing the supplier to consumer concept which has been criticised in the literature (Coughlan et al, 2006).

Conceptual Framework for the Study

For the purpose of this study, the distribution functions model for packaged tours has been adopted. The model provides a schematic representation of the functions involved in the distribution of packaged tours to international tourists (who incidentally constitute the main market for tour operators in Ghana), in this case, an all-inclusive circuit tour. The three sets of channel members are consumers, intermediaries, and suppliers. These are differentiated according to whether they are in the market or at the destination and by the functions they perform. While the consumers are buying, the suppliers are selling and the intermediaries, depending on their position on the chain are in varying degrees both sourcing product and distributing it.

The nature of the product- an all-inclusive circuit tour- is the dominant influence in this system. Consumers and suppliers are not interacting directly with each other. Rather, the products of individual suppliers are being combined and sold by intermediaries with a range of the other products to consumers who are purchasing a single, all-inclusive product in a single transaction. The model depicts major elements and their positions in the distribution chain. These are the travel agent (TA), the wholesaler (WS) and the inbound operator (IBO). Also shown in the model are elements such as airlines, attractions, accommodation and coachlines. It also shows the locations of the destination and the market as well as those of consumers. Consumers are doing the buying, suppliers doing the selling and intermediaries linking suppliers to consumers.

The model is a departure from the supply-side approach which is typical of distribution models. This approach depicts the links from suppliers to consumers with unidirectional arrows. The demand-side approach adopted by this model is provided by Coughlan et al (2006). Nonetheless, this demand-side approach has one key defect in that, it has no empirical or theoretical development. Also, there is relatively little attention given to the way tourists perceive and use different channels (Oorni, 2003; Wolfe, Hsu & Kang, 2004). However, the emphasis given to the demand-side (the tourist) as the main actors in the distribution function informs the choice and adoption of this model for the study. (See Figure 4).

Central to the whole process is the bundling function undertaken to assemble the package. This involves combining air travel to and from the destination country (generally using market or destination-based airlines), transport (commonly by coach) in a number of local destinations, and the arrangement of accommodation (and often meals), attractions and activities in each of these destinations. Designing the package and sourcing the individual components requires knowledge of what is available, selection of these from a range of suppliers, negotiation of rates, booking, payment, and transfer of title.

Depending on the number of different destinations in the circuit, the range of activities included, and the diversity of product available, this can be a complex process in putting together the packages, the wholesalers commonly rely upon the destination presence and greater familiarity of the inbound operator to facilitate the sorting and bundling process. They do this by recommending suitable suppliers and providing the design of the itinerary (Sharda & Pearce, 2006; Pearce et al, 2007). Inbound operators may also be used to order and pay for the accommodation, touring transport, and attractions and activities, and subsequently deal with any practical matters which may occur during the course of the tour. Rates will be negotiated between these intermediaries and the suppliers on the basis of such factors as volume, reliability and quality of service. The destination presence and knowledge of the in-bound operators become especially important where significant cultural and linguistic differences exist between the market and the destination (Taniguchi, 2006).

Travel agents in turn facilitate the sale of the package to individual tourists. In Bucklin's (1966, 1972) terms, they enable market decentralization by their dispersed location in sites convenient to the consumer, they enable the purchase of individual seats on a tour (reduction in lot size) ahead of travel (delivery time), and, through making available a variety of different tours, provide the consumer with assortment and depth. Travel agents also perform key functions in the transfer of title (by way of tickets and /or vouchers), initiating the flow of payment through the distribution system to the suppliers.

The travel agent, for example, is selling on behalf of the wholesaler or supplier rather than reselling products they have already purchased. Figure 4 also depicts the efficiencies that the distribution channels bring in bridging supply and demand. Demand is progressively concentrated throughout the market by the travel agents and wholesalers, then dispersed through the multiplicity of suppliers in the destination.

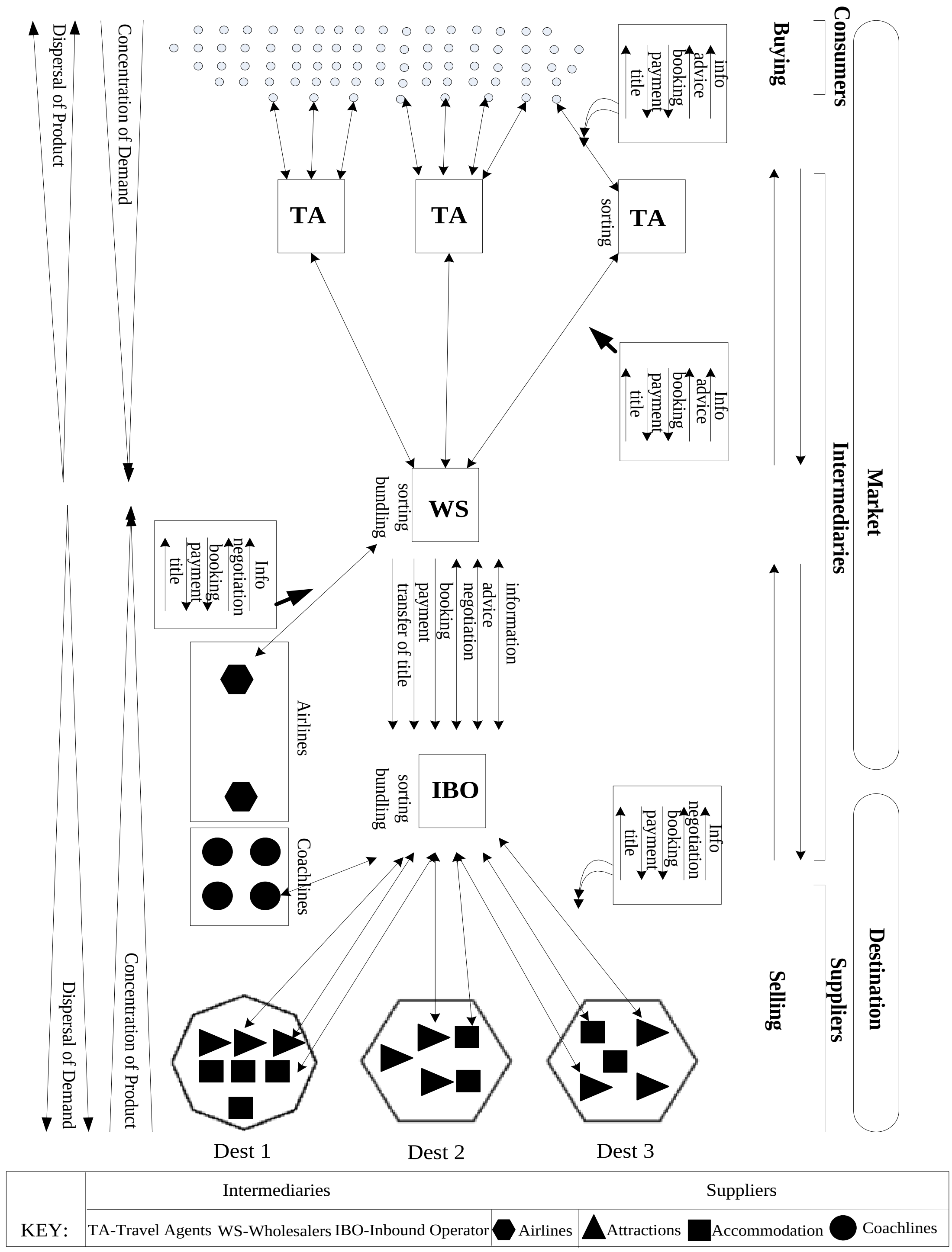

Figure 4: Distribution Functions for Packaged Tours

Source: Adopted from Pearce (2008).

Conversely, the product is progressively concentrated (by arrangement rather than physically as in the case of manufactured goods) by the actions of the inbound operators and wholesalers until an all-inclusive package is available. This is then sold in a suburban travel agency to an individual consumer.

Other forms of concentration occur in this process. The consumer, for example, is making a single payment for a wide range of services while the wholesaler is invoiced by the inbound operator for all the products used rather than by each of the suppliers separately (a significant saving in time and expense, especially where international transfer fees are high). These efficiencies, together with the economies of scale which the associated volume of transactions may bring, can contribute to significantly lower prices for the overall package (Pearce, 2008).

For the customized tourist segment, the allocation of distribution functions is very similar to that shown in Figure 4 except that the sorting and bundling functions are undertaken closer to the consumers and in response to their specific needs, generally by the travel agent. Access to a wider assortment of products is needed to meet the more varied range of individual requirements.

The basic channel system depicted in Figure 4 can be modified, compressed, or expanded to give channels differing depth and structure as functions are assumed by or displaced from particular channel members; that is, they are moved backwards or forwards in the channel (Coughlan et al, 2006). Wholesalers, for instance, may source their products directly from suppliers, by-passing the inbound operators. This occurs most commonly in short-haul markets, where the lesser distances involved result in greater mutual awareness of supply and demand and facilitate more direct arrangements compared to more distant and emerging markets.

At the demand end, retail travel agencies may be bypassed as other intermediaries deal directly with the consumer. In Great Britain, direct sellers account for about 80% of the outbound travel to New Zealand (Pearce et al, 2007). As their name suggests, these intermediaries sell direct to the consumer, primarily by phone through a call centre, with other sales being conducted online or through their own outlets. These direct sellers are primarily destination specialists catering to long-haul customized tourists to whom they are able to offer a high level of service and product knowledge because of the “concentrating expertise” that they are able to provide (Pearce et al, 2007). The more rapid uptake of the internet in the United States of America is progressively enabling wholesalers there to complement agency sales with direct online distribution. Other examples are Japan where wholesalers are increasingly targeting consumers through media advertising as well as through travel agencies (Taniguchi, 2006), while in India wholesalers may distribute their products directly at consumer travel fairs (Sharda & Pearce, 2006).

The roles of different channel members are often quite clear-cut; in other cases the functions are rather blurred. In Australia, for example, there is a clear separation of the functions of the wholesalers and retailers. This is far less evident in a country like India, where many of the newly established intermediaries have yet to consolidate their role and are actively trying to engage with all segments, retailing and wholesaling, ticketing and packaging.

This model also differentiates among the three sets of channel members- consumers, intermediaries and suppliers according to their location, being they in the market or at the destination and by the functions they perform. It also clearly defines the positions and linkages between the travel agent, wholesaler /tour operator. Furthermore, the locations of the various service sectors such as airlines, accommodation and attractions have been highlighted. The model presents a comprehensive approach to the distribution functions of travel intermediaries in general and the tour operator in particular.

An interesting exception to the supply-side or intermediation approach is provided by Buckley (1987) who looks at the reverse perspective and adopts a transaction chain analysis, arguing that “An analysis of transactions... proceeds from the main actor- the tourist- and examines all the actor’s transactions.” This is in line with Cuoghlan et al’s (2006) view cited in Pearce (2008) where they give emphasis to demand as a useful starting point for considering a generalized model of tourism distribution.

In this model the three main channel members made up of consumers, intermediaries and suppliers were identified. The focus of the study is the tour operator intermediary. He is positioned between the suppliers of travel services and consumers of such services. The travel services include air transport, inland transport, accommodation and attractions, while the consumers are the tourists from generating countries overseas. In Ghana the tour operator works in collaboration with other intermediaries, in this case, the travel agents. Most of the tour operators in Ghana are inbound operators who concentrate on receiving international tourists into the country.

The tour operator in Ghana undertakes certain functions such as provision of necessary information, advice, negotiation, booking, payment and transfer of title thereby satisfying the provision of time, place, form/state, and possession utilities. He also undertakes some sorting and bundling of the tourist product and thereafter sells the package to the tourists through travel agents who facilitate the selling process.

While the tourism product is concentrated in the destination area, demand for such products is concentrated at the international market. There is therefore adispersal of the tourist product in the market while in the destination area there is a dispersal of demand of such products (Figure 4).

Summary

The chapter examined various frameworks in tourism distribution including the ‘ Needs-functions model’ ‘the place of the tour operator in the tourism distribution system’ ‘the structure of the United States travel intermediation’ and ‘distribution functions for packaged tours’. A critique of the various models was outlined.

Informed by the critique, the model of ‘Distribution functions for packaged tours’ was chosen for the study. This model gives a thorough description of how tour operators as intermediaries perform various functions in intermediation. The next chapter deals with the role of information and communications technology in travel intermediation.

CHAPTER FOUR

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY IN TRAVEL INTERMEDIATION

Introduction

Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the adoption of hardware and software to handle and manipulate information, has become a universal feature of the travel industry (Christian, 2001; Olmeda & Sheldom, 2001; Poon, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Characterised by the need to supply and exchange information throughout the chain of production and distribution, the travel industry has particularly proved suitable for the adoption of ICT. This has been further encouraged by the intangible and perishable nature of the tourism product (Bennett, 1993). The role of ICT travel intermediation has been acknowledged by a number of researchers.

The chapter further reviews related literature with a focus on ICT and intermediation with the aim of examining the extent to which this phenomenon poses a threat to traditional travel intermediaries. The discussion centres on issues such as the advent of ICT, ICT and tourism, tourism products and the Internet, the Internet in travel intermediation and, ICT and disintermediation.

The Emergence of Information Technology

Internet originated from the military network ARPANet, which was introduced by the US Department of Defence in 1969 (Laws, 2000). Ever since the removal in 1990 of the requirement that official support be obtained in order to join the Internet, the number of computer servers and users from private firms and individuals has been growing at an exponential rate. The Angus Reid Group (2000) forecasted that at the current rate of growth, there would be one billion Internet users by the year 2005. Similarly, Poon (2001) stated that the amount of online direct sales by travel suppliers will grow from 22 percent in 1997 to 30 percent in 2002, a prediction which came to pass.

According to Greenberg (2009 web emerging technology (web 2.0) drives social change that affects all businesses. He went further to say that the web triggers are volution on how people communicate by facilitating intensive peer-to-peer collaborations and easy access to real time communication. The Internet provides convenient, easy access to up-to-date information, price comparisons, increased awareness of discount offerings and time savings. E-travelling is, therefore, being highly adopted by customers. (Chu, 2001).

Information and Communications Technology and Tourism

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries which, in the view of Block (1996), has historically been an early adopter of new technology. According to Week and Crouch (1999), tourism is thought to be among the largest industries in the electronic market place. This is due to the intangible and digital character of the distribution of tourism products. In their view there have been surveys which show that travel products are among the most popular products to buy on-line.

Morgan, Pritchard and Abott (2001) maintain that the international tourism system is dependent on ICT for its future growth, competitiveness and long-term survival, particularly in terms of tourism marketing and distribution. The tourism sector plays an important role in increasing the demand for ICT services. Tourism is generally an ICT-intensive industry in terms of registered home pages, number of visitors to websites and on-line trade (Morgan et al, (2001). It is a fact that tourism (travel, transport and hotel reservation) is the single most important product bought on-line and contributes 38 percent of all on-line trade (UNCTAD, 2002a). Tourism is said to represent the product with the largest growth rate of 40 per cent in e-transactions.

According to the consultancy firm Forrester, more than 60 million households in the United States booked travel on-line in 2002, spending approximately US$ 20 billion, constituting about 10 per cent of the travel market. Hoffman, alluding to these claims has described the information superhighway as 'an electronic tidal wave' and that once the " flood of technological innovations has seeped into every type of business and industry, the entire landscape of retail and service industries will be dramatically re-arranged" (Hoffman, 1994: 94-103).

Dilating on the issue (Hoffman, 1994) went on to say that the 'tsunami' which is sweeping across the service sector is all the more critical in tourism because as an intangible product, its marketing largely depends upon visual representation. The critical need for tourism businesses to embrace technology as a means to create and sustain a competitive advantage had previously been extensively emphasised in the strategic marketing literature (Porter, 1985; Poon, 1993).

In terms of technological resources, travel agents and tour operators need to appropriately respond to the recent advances in Internet and mobile technologies. For instance, there are increasing demands for ubiquitous access to tourism information systems for service coordination and process integration. Competitive advantage is increasingly driven by the advancement of information technology and innovation (Chiu, Yueh, Leung & Hung, 2009). Hinchcliffe (2006) observe that the web technology in particular, is an important resource to create more efficient business processes. He also noted that the web also is a powerful channel for organisations to develop or enhance interactions with customers to strengthen business-customer relatonships.

Lending support to this contention Wynne et al (2001) added that tourism possesses certain features that make it an industry suited to the application of electronic commerce (e-commence). Observation shows that the electronic distribution systems such as the global distribution system (GDS) for airline ticket and hotel rooms are already using the Internet. At Travelocity, Sabre's Internet company (www. travelocity.com) end-consumers are able to check the database for the availability of flight tickets. Airlines have also started to use the Internet for the sale and distribution of tickets, provide free, real-time information on the availability of flights and seats (Vich-i-Martorell, 2004).

According to Wynne, et al (2001) the tourism industry is characterised by large numbers of small suppliers who are globally scattered. The tourists he emphasised, are numerous, diverse and geographically separated from the suppliers. Corroborating this assertion Buhalis (1998) maintained that the GDS could take advantage of the availability and scope of the Internet and develop user-friendly interfaces, which makes it easier for customers and professionals to use. It has been observed that, possibly, the technically most difficult task would be the building of an integrated reservation system for the whole industry, and hence make the current GDS owners to have a potential advantage to leverage their technology to become the core intermediary (Wynne et al 2001).

However, Wynne, et al (2001) noted that the current GDS owners have a potential advantage to leverage their technology to become the core intermediary. Inclining to this assertion, Peterkofsky (2002) observed that Worldspan and Sabre have already introduced dynamic packaging tools to let agents automatically bundle together air, hotel and car rental components into easily bookable itineraries. With e-travelling, travel transactions can simply be conducted with mouse-click or touches of a finger, anytime-anywhere. On-line services offered through e-travelling, therefore, provide significant values to customers such as efficiency, convenience and empowerment. Perhaps customers are hesitant to do on-line transaction because of security issues. However, with the improvement of on-line security technology, the customer's trust will gradually improve. In addition, if e-travelling complying with the security standard customers' confidence to make payment through the electronic on-line system (e-payment) will increase (Susanto, Almanawar & Tuan, 2011).

Tourism Products and the Internet

The two main components of the tourism product, travel and accommodation, are both widely known to have been marketed via the Internet for several years (Vich-i-Martorell, 2004). Sharing similar view, Cahill (1996) contends that there has been a sharp rise in the hotel sector's use of the Internet due to two main factors: (a) the enormous capacity of the Internet for effective direct marketing strategies; and (b) the big sales opportunities that it offers management. Giving credence to this contention, Michels (2002) maintains that Forrester Research expects the lodging industry to benefit greatly from the web over the next few years. Also lending support to this notion, Thomas (2003) observes that, in respect of such development Hilton International, Accor and Six Continents have initially invested 5.6 million pounds sterling in WorldRes Europe, which is a subsidiary of US-based WorldRes.com.

Similarly airlines have discovered that the Internet is a superb channel for the sale and distribution of their products. In the view of Buhalis (1998) it is clear that tourism is inevitably affected by all these technological developments and none of the market players involved can escape their impact. Connolly, Olsen and Moore (1998), Sussman and Baker (1996), and Millman (1998) have also articulated the importance of the Internet to the tourism business when they noted that tourism related services have emerged as a leading product category to be promoted and distributed through the Internet. Contributing to the discourse, Compart (2003) also observes that efforts are even being made to create a travel domain on the Internet, where web addresses would end in'.travel' rather than '.com'. It is yet to be seen whether this has materialised.

The WTO disclosed that the key to Internet success lies in the swift identification of customers' needs and the establishment of direct contact with consumers, offering them comprehensive, personalised and up-to-date information (WTO, 1999). Buhalis (1998) maintains that in order to satisfy the demand for tourism and survive in the long-term, there is no other alternative but to use information technology (IT) and to interact with the market. According to Nielsen, in April 2004, more than 8 million people visited Expedia. com, more than 7 million visited Travelocity . com, and more than 6 million visited Orbitz . com (GreenSpan, 2003). In the view of Inkpen (1998), tourism is one of the businesses with the highest potential for Internet development, holding second place on the Forrester Research List.

The international tourism system is dependent on information technology for its future growth, competitiveness and long-term survival, particularly in terms of tourism marketing and distribution (Morgan et al, 2001). The sheer size and dynamic nature of the WWW and to a lesser extent television shopping, which have become the world's fastest-growing areas of commercial activity have ensured that technology and tourism are increasingly interdependent and that, indeed, technology is dictating the restructuring of the entire tourism industry (Walker, 1997, Marshall, 2000). Tour operators are expected to capitalise on these developments to employ the ICT in their operations so as to enhance their businesses.

Usage of Website in Tour Operations

A direct fit between the Internet and travel and tourism products has been articulated by various studies (Christian , 2001; Poon, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). The Angus Reid Group made a forecast that at the then rate of growth, there would have been one billion internet users by the end of 2005 (Angus Reid Group, 2000).

The Internet is said to have effective ways to develop a single and sustainable electronic infrastructure for gathering information and business transactions for both travellers and suppliers. It enables suppliers to carry out one-to-one marketing and mass customization (Law, Leung & Wong, 2004). In other words, travel suppliers can now understand each customer's needs and therefore target each customer individually and deliver tailor-made products (Law et al, 2004).

The literature shows that as a consequence of online travel developments, business competition for traditional intermediaries has increased (Poon, 2001). The Internet is expected to change the role of travel agencies and tour operators as information providers (Buhalis, 1998). In the views of Poon (2001) and Buhalis (1998) as the power of the Internet grows and empowers customers to deveop and buy their own itineraries the very existence of travel agents and tour operators will be threatened. They maintain that the Internet is becoming an important new channel for commerce in a wide range of industries.

It has been observed by Wynne et al, (2001 that while there are opportunities presented by this channel, such as by-passing others in the value chain, there is still much debate and speculation on exactly how the use of the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web (WWW) will affect established industries. They further maintain that the disparities inherent in mass production and mass consumption have caused intermediaries to enter into the distribution chain between buyers and sellers in most contemporary markets. To Wynne et al, (2001) it seems clear that the Internet as a new medium undermines many of the key assumptions on which traditional distribution philosophies are based, that is to say it has the potential to transform and even obliterate some distribution channels.

Another school of thought in the literature holds the view that the role of such traditional intermediaries is expected to grow in importance, since their greatest ability is “to collate, organise and interpret large amount of data in a way that delivers the best value and the most exciting travel experiences for the customer” (O’Connor, 1999:114). The argument is that travel agencies and tour operators not only provide information but also advice. Law et al (2004) maintain that the rapid growth of the travel industry requires sophisticated information technologies (ITs) to manage the increasing volume and quality of tourism traffic.

Supporting this assertion, Walle (1996) and Palmer and Mc Cole (1999) also argue that a key strength of travel agencies is their ability to provide personal information and advice to travellers continuously. Other researchers maintain that the role of travel agencies and tour operators would consequently remain secure if their advice-offering capability were strengthened by the presence of the Internet, rather than if they functioned according to the more negative image of being simply “booking agencies” (Fong, 2001; Law et al, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002).

The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Travel Intermediation

The information-based nature of tourism means that the Internet, which offers global reach and multimedia capability, is an increasingly important means of promoting and distributing tourism services (Walle, 1996). Prior studies have indicated that modern travellers demand more high quality travel services, products, information, and value for their money (Lubetkin, 1999; Samenfink, 1999; Christian, 2001). The emergence of new tourism services and products in addition to a rapid increase in tourism demand, have brought about a large scale adoption of ITs in general, and in particular, the Internet as an electronic intermediary. In order words, the Internet serves as a new communication and distribution channel for e-travellers and suppliers of travel services and products.

A number of authorities have attempted to identify and classify the potential benefits and implications of doing business on the Internet (Verity & Hoff, 1994; Quelch, & Klein, 1996; Berthon, Pitt & Watson, 1996). Adding another dimension to this view, Rayport and Sviokla (1994) distinguish between the physical value chain (PVC) and the virtual value chain (VVC). They introduce the concept of the 'marketplace', a virtual realm where products and services exist as digital information and can be delivered through information based channels. They also contend that managers who understand how to master both their physical virtual value chains will be able to extract value in the most efficient and effective manner.

Various studies have shown the direct fit of the Internet and travel and tourism products. With the emergence of the Internet the process of fast information transmission can be addressed effectively at a low cost (Christian, 2001; Poon, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Tourists can now receive comprehensive, timely and relevant information in a virtual environment to assist their decision-making process. This in turn, necessitates the balancing of perishable tourism products and changeable tourist demand. Furthermore, the tourism industry is diversified, with a plethora of different suppliers that operate independently, even as tourists expect travelling to be a complete experience.

To resolve this mismatch, the Internet offers an effective means for developing a single and sustainable electronic infrastructure for information gathering and business transactions for both travellers and suppliers. The natural outcome for this is that the suppliers can carry out one-to-one marketing and mass customisation. It means that, travel suppliers can now understand each customer's needs, and therefore target each customer individually and deliver tailor-made products. What is more important here is that travel suppliers can understand how to deliver information and sell their products and services to customers directly through their web sites. Law et al, (2001) went on to conclude that this new channel also enabled tourism business to improve their competitiveness and performance.

According to Olmeda and Sheldom (2001), from a supplier's perspective, a travel web site provides lower distribution costs, higher revenues, and larger market share. On the other hand, the traveller sees the Internet as a medium which allows one to communicate directly with tourism suppliers to request information, and to purchase products and services at anytime and any place. Previous studies show that the Internet is the most effective when used as an advertising and marketing tool (Walle, 1996; Kasavana, Knustet & Polonowski, 1997). Prior to the advent of the w w w, organisations needed at least two media for marketing, thus, promotion to raise awareness and a sales medium (face-to-face or telephone) to process the transaction. Today, web sites are channels of distribution as well as communication. This makes the conversion of interest into action and sales more immediate; they are particularly useful for last-minute and out-of-hours bookings. Undoubtedly the single most important recent development in communication technology has been the expansion of the Internet. Created in the 1970s and initially used by US military and academic institutions, the Internet has now entered the mainstream of business thinking and commercial application Sheldon (1997). In particular, the WWW has been the fastest growing part of the Internet, and provides industries with unprecedented opportunities with its hypertext and multimedia capabilities (MacDonald-Wallace, 1997). The Web has tremendous marketing potential, whether it is used to sell directly or as a vehicle to attract and stimulate consumer interest, and it allows small companies to compete on a ‘virtual level’ playing field with larger rivals. For such companies, for the first time ever, the Web enables the combination of interactivity with advertising—allowing them both to promote their message and to process the end transaction, offering consumers the opportunity to investigate, browse and purchase travel and tourism products (Briggs, 1997).

The Internet is fast becoming an important new channel for commerce in a wide range of industries. While the opportunities presented by this channel seem easily apparent (e.g. by-passing others in the value chain), there is still much debate and speculation on exactly how the use of the Internet and in particular the WWW will affect established industries. For example, the consumer no longer has to wait for a retailer (who does not carry a food inventory of the latest products) to open, drive there, attempt to find a sales person who is generally ill-informed, and then pay over the odds to purchase a product. Products and prices can be compared on the Web and lots of information can quite easily be gleaned

As a consequence to the online travel developments, business competition for traditional travel agencies has increased. Poon (2001) argues that relying more heavily on the Internet gives suppliers a new independence that will gradually decrease their dependence on, and their commission payable to, travel agencies. Similarly, travellers may buy more directly from suppliers, thus by-passing travel agencies. Inevitably, the travel agencies' traditional role as a distribution channel has changed (Buhalis, 1998), leading to the possible ultimate disintermediation of travel agencies.

Disintermediation and Information and Communication Technology

The boom of the on-line travel industry has proven to be as much a challenge as it is an opportunity to tour operators. As suggested by Bloch, Pigneus and Steiner (1996), the traveller is gaining a self-service mentality.This implies that, they gather travel services on their own and form their own customised holiday packages. More travellers are performing functions of tour operators by assembling single elements of a trip into one package.

The Internet and other on-line services, combined with widespread adoption of personal computers by businesses and consumers, have led to a growing role for e-commerce in the world economy. E-commerce is the buying and selling of information, products, and services through computer and telecommunications networks (Butler et al,1997). Within the tour operator industry, the traditional centralised market structure is currently under attack from many providers in the marketplace who are trying to access their customers directly. This trend is particularly evident in the airline industry where carriers use the more direct channels such as the on-line services to sell their tickets without the use of travel agents or tour operators (Malone, 1987).

The development of the Internet and WWW in the 1990s as a means for the global sharing of information and resources has made the traditional marketing practices obsolete (Buhalis, 1998). Through the Internet, information can be provided instantly to potential customers anywhere in the world, and the customer plays a more active role in the search for information. The ability of the Web to facilitate two-way communication is a useful marketing tool. However, marketing on the Internet is not limited to only information distribution. It also has direct selling potential. Although direct selling is developing more slowly than the information distribution of the web, the potential for e-commerce is tremendous. There is no accurate estimate of Internet sites and users, but there is a clear trend for all of the major firms in the tourism industry to go online (O'Connor, 1999).

Traditionally, distribution in the tourism industry is characterised by intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agents (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008). However, Buhalis (1998), Van Rekom, Teunissen & Go (1999) claim that there are arguments for disintermediation in the tourism industry in the electronic marketplace. One part of the argument for disintermediation, they maintain, is that the amount of value-added services available on the Internet makes it possible for tourists to search for all the relevant information they need about interesting destinations, accommodation, transport, travel insurance, currency conversion among others.

Also, reservations can be made directly on the Internet from tourism businesses such as airlines, hotels and car rentals. These arrangements are traditionally undertaken by travel agencies and tour operators. The increasing availability of information, as well as the prospect of making reservations direct from airlines, hotels and car rentals means that the role of intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agencies may become redundant. One of the main features of any e-travelling is the ability to provide direct transactions between suppliers (airline and accommodation providers) and customers. Such capability raises a concern about the role of traditional intermediaries such as travel agents and tour operators. Disintermediation of these intermediaries within the travel industries is highly likely as stated by various studies (McCubbrey & Taylor, 2005; Killion, 2009).

Bailey and Bakos (1997), however, hold the contrary view that markets do not necessarily become disintermediated in the electronic marketplace. This view is further shared by Rachman and Richins (1997) when they argue that complete elimination of traditional intermediaries by an electronic market is unlikely to occur in the tourism industry in the immediate future. This contention is also supported by Rastrollo and Alarcon when they declared, "it appears that we will not be witnesses to the disappearance of all intermediaries, because they will be using the Internet as a means to continue to offer services that are valued by the customer" (Rastrollo & Alarcon, 2000:215).

Considering emerging trends and their implications for the tourism industry, Wynne et al (2001) observe that the tourism market is increasingly organized on a global level, with heightened competition being characterized by a network of interactions. Tourists are travelling more frequently but for shorter periods. They increasingly request more specialized trips, and have increasing expectations in terms of convenience, value and customization. Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable, increasingly accustomed to automation and developing a self- service mentality. They want global advice, service quality and market transparency. Yet, they are increasingly making only last minute reservations (Bloch et al, 1996; Bloch & Sager, 1996).

According to Bloch and Seger (1996), the tourism industry has become inherently global and this is reinforced by the use of the Internet, which is a medium that has no geographical boundaries. Local players in the industry will have to fit into the new global structure. At the simplest level, the growth of the Internet provides a new distribution channel for the industry and facilitates the development of a virtual value chain. In the light of the trends observed in the industry and the opportunities presented by e-commerce, it is likely that the growth of the Internet as a medium in the tourism industry will have the following impacts.

First, the physical activities surrounding the tourist experience will not fundamentally change. Technology may be harnessed to improve the experience, reduce costs and improve efficiencies and service. Those firms that concentrate on providing good service and expertly managing the tourist experience will be the most successful. However, there will definitely be opportunities for suppliers to add new value in the virtual realm. Current examples of this are the site www.africam.com and the tourist discussion groups set up by various internet sites.

Secondly, it is likely that all virtual activities will move to the new channel. The provision of information, the arranging of reservations and searching for destinations are all activities that can be done far more efficiently on the Internet than through printed brochures and current intermediaries. This could remove the advantages of proprietary networks such as computer reservation systems (Bloch & Seger, 1996).

The Case for Re-Intermediation

In contrast to the argument by some researchers which seem to suggest disintermediation in the tourism distribution business some researchers hold the view that the tasks of the traditional intermediaries may rather be changed (Bailey & Bakos, 1997; Buhalis, 1998; Van Rekom et al, 1999, Pedersen & Methlie, 2000). These researchers contend that these organisations may be given new roles in the distribution chain. This role they define as a re-intermediation. Sharing this concept of re-intermediation, Glaglis, Klein, and O'keefe, (1999) and Van Rekom et al, (1999) observe that, finally, electronic markets may create opportunities for a new type of intermediaries, called cyber-mediation.

Discussing the indispensability of traditional intermediaries albeit the emergence of the Internet, Bloch and Seger (1996) argue that much of the hype around the Internet focuses on its ability to directly link suppliers and customers and hence the potential to cause mass disintermediation in the value chain. Indeed, the first actors to launch on-line ventures were focused on disintermediation. However, the market is realizing that, just as in the physical world, consumers do not want to deal with the problems of contacting multiple suppliers to compare and shop. Some, if not most, will want and be prepared to pay for the level of service that comes from dealing with an intermediary. Such intermediary will offer them advice, and save them time and money (Bloch & Seger, 1996).

Bloch et al (1996) contend that potential tourists face a wide range of problems when trying to book directly with suppliers on the Internet. For example, they require knowledge of where to search for the destination sites, since conventional search engines are not effective. It also takes time to visit each destination site to view the information. Different servers typically present information in different formats and it requires perseverance to make valid comparisons. Often, it is not possible to book online, and in many instances, tourists cannot book separate parts of a trip through the same supplier (essentially, no supplier caters for all tourist segments). Moreover, individual destination service providers are not in a position to benefit from the ability the Internet provides to build up customer profiles, since most customers are full-time visitors.

However, intermediaries can potentially build up very detailed customer profiles. Considering this, in relation to issues discussed on the original need for intermediation in the tourism industry, it should be clear that mass disintermediation is highly unlikely. (see also Rastrollo & Alarcon, 2000). Instead it is almost certain that new virtual intermediaries will develop (Block et al, 1996; Bailey & Bakos, 1997; Pederson & Methlie, 2000).

Since the Internet transcends location and political boundaries, new intermediaries will also have to transcend location. They will also have to offer comprehensive services that allow customers to make all their travel arrangements at one site.It must also allow them to maintain a database that will allow the intermediary to build up an accurate profile of each tourist and use this to customize the services to each customer.

To ascertain the relationship that exists between the ICT and traditional travel intermediaries in Ghana the study investigated the extent to which the ICT is used in tour operations in the country. The rest of the thesis provides information in this direction.

Summary

The chapter presented a further review of literature with a focus on ICT in travel intermediation. The chapter looked at tourism as one of the earliest world's largest industries to adopt the ICT as a result of the industry's product being intangible and digital in nature. Travel products had been observed to be among the most popular products to buy on-line. The chapter discussed the features of tourism that had made it an industry well placed for the application of e-commerce.

Travel and accommodation was seen as the two main components of the tourism product which had been marketed through the Internet for several years. The chapter covered Internet's offer of enormous capacity for effective direct marketing strategies for the hotel sector as well as offering big sales opportunities for management. The issue of airlines seeing the Internet as a superb channel for the sale and distribution of their products was discussed in the chapter.

Also discussed in the chapter was the emergence of new tourism services and the increase in tourism demand which had necessitated the wide-scale adoption of the Internet as an electronic intermediary.The boom in the on-line travel industry which brought both challenges as well as opportunities to tour operators was covered.. The chapter also discussed the arguments for disintermediation in the tourism industry in the electronic market place. The next chapter looks at the study area and methodological issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the study area and the methodological procedures adopted in carrying out the fieldwork in line with the study objectives. The issues covered include: the study area, the research philosophy, research design, data collection and related issues, data and sources. It also discusses issues on target population and the sample frame, sampling procedure, study instrument and training and fieldwork. Finally, the chapter touches on pre-testing, methods of data collection, validity and reliability, methods of data analysis and challenges encounted from the field.

The Study Area

Accra is the administrative capital of the Republic of Ghana. It is situated on the Atlantic coast about 25 km west of the Greenwich Meridian. Accra, which is of a metropolitan status has an estimated population of about 3 million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The residents of Accra are of a heterogenous nature, made up of Ga-Adangmes, who are the indigenes, and many other ethnic groups (Surf Publications. 2003).

Accra is a relatively modern metropolis with a few high-rise buildings (sky-scrappers) yet the urban landscape is still that of a developing city. Some old colonial buildings can still be seen, especially close to the Osu Castle (the seat of government) in Osu, James Town, and Chorkor. The main roads are mostly first class ones, and this makes it easy to move around. However, some of the streets still remain scruffy lanes, lined with open sewers and are untarred, especially towards the outskirts. The metropolis also still has pockets of ,unplanned sections, with some areas noisy and sometimes chaotic in activity. Nonetheless, the Accra metropolis is a safe and relaxing one.

Economic activities in the metropolis are mainly commercial ventures. These ventures include shopping, (with large departmental stores such as Melcom, UTC and Accra Mall) trading (Makola Nos. 1 and 2 open markets), tourism, banking, insurance , transport (made up of airlines, taxis, buses and coaches, railways and car rentals) and street-hawking and fishing.

Accra, being the seat of government is privileged to be the custodian of a number of infrastructural developments both private and public. Mention can be made of the Jubilee/Flagstaff House, Parliament House (Job 600), Accra International Conference Centre, Ministries, Peduase Lodge on the Aburi road, a few kilometres north of the metropolis.

Accra also harbours a host of tourist infrastructure and products which offer an enabling environment for investment in the tourism industry. Some major attractions in the metropolis include coastal and beaches (such as La Pleasure beach, Kokrobite Beach Resort, New Coco Beach Resort), Accra Zoo, the National Museum, the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleom and Memorial Park, W. E. B Du Bois Memorial Centre. There are also George Padmore Research Library of African Affairs, the Premier University of Ghana, Legon and the open air markets of Accra.

Other attractions some of which are cultural in nature include the Ga-Mantse Palace, the Homowo Festival, and the Centre for National Culture. The rest are Osu Castle, Independence Square, Liberation square, hotels such as Novotel, Goldem Tulip and La Palm Beach Resort and the Kotoka International Airport.

Such is the tourism endowment level of the metropolis that might have influenced the concentration of tour operation activities in the nation's capital, Accra. Infact, Accra is the home to the bulk of travel agencies and tour operators, car rentals as well as the head offices of the trade associations.

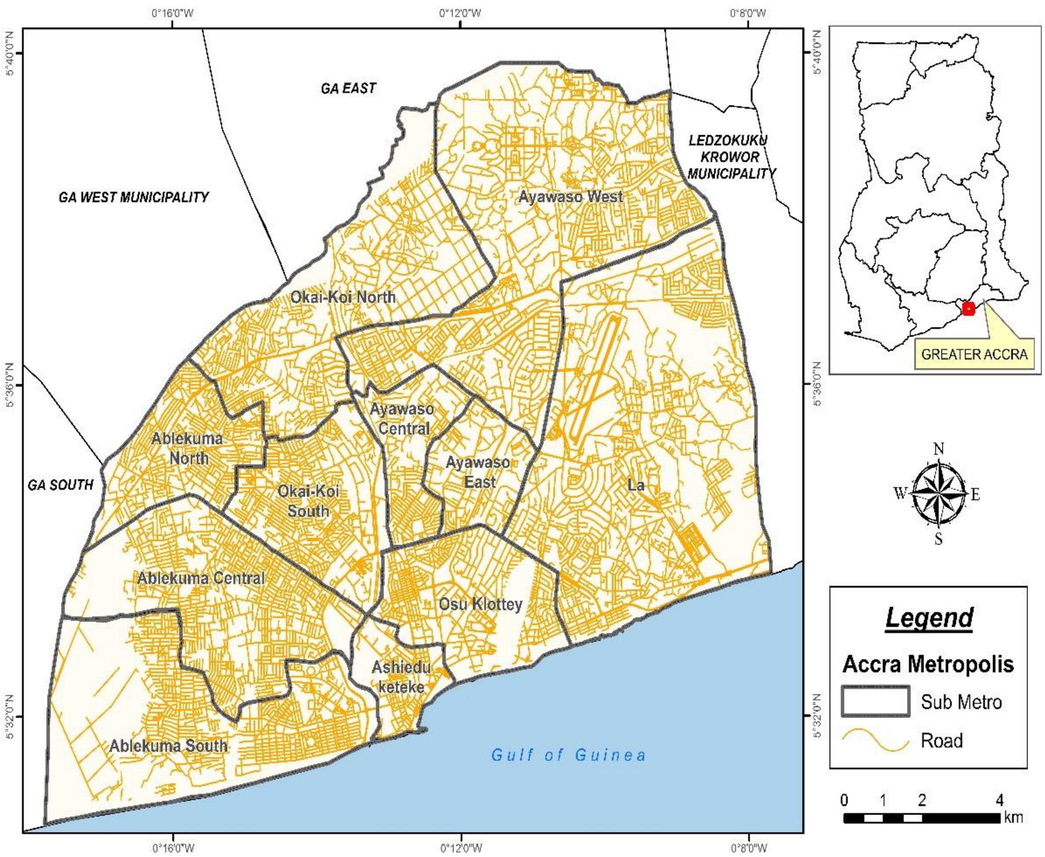

Figure 5: Study Area in Regional (Greater Accra) and National context

Source: Department of Geography and Regional Planning (GIS unit) (2013)

The Research Philosophy

The use of pragmatism as the philosophical foundation for social research provides perspectives to the understanding of the mixed method approach. Methodologists, therefore, associate the philosophy of pragmatism to the mixed method distinguishing it from the quantitative inquiry which draws from positivism and post positivism paradigms and qualitative inquiry which is based on interpretivism or constructivism philosophies (Rallis & Rossman, 2003; Johnson & Owumegbudzie, 2004)

In the views of Johnson and Turner (2003), the mixed method helps to obtain convergence or corroboration of findings, eliminate or minimize key plausible alternatives. The method also offers explanations for conclusions which are drawn from the research data and elucidates the divergent aspects of a phenomenon. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) also suggest that the mixed method is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative epistemological ideologies.

The qualitative approach captures reality in interaction. It studies a small number of respondents and employs no random sampling techniques. It also attempts to present the information gathered verbally in a detailed and complete form, not in numbers or formulae (no statistical analysis). The qualitative measures variables and aims to understand people not to measure them. It employs research procedures that produce descriptive data, presenting in the respondents' own words their views and experiences. This method tries to approach reality without pre-conceived ideas and prestructured models and patterns. The purpose of the qualitative approach is to interprete meaningful human actions and interpretations that people give of themselves and others. The analysis is on discovery and exploration rather than on hypothesis and testing. (Sarantakos, 2005).

Conversely, the quantitative approach sees reality as being objective, simple and positive, consisting of sense impressions. In this method, there is one reality in nature and one truth. This approach sees human being as being determined by their social world in the same way that the nationalistic world is governed by fixed laws. They are subject to fixed patterns that are empirically observable. In the quantitative method, facts should be kept apart from values. Social scientists should not make value judgements, that is value and neutrality.

National and social sciences share common logical and methodological foundations and as such social sciences ought to employ the methods of the physical sciences. The ideological bases of this school of thought are “quantitativism” (Placing emphasis on measurement and qualification), behaviourism (stressing the exclusive interest in the study of observable behaviour) and positive epistemology (Sarantakos, 2005). These observations inform the ongoing study to adopt the pragmatic philosophy so as to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyse data

This will come out with convergence of findings that will minimize plausible alternative explanations for drawn conclusions from the research data as well as to elucidate divergent aspects of a phenomenon. Acccording to Bryman (1984), the decision to continue both qualitative and quantitative research methods makes intuitive sense even though a technical one. Suffice it to say that, there appears a wide acceptance of the relevance and rigour of mixed methods research in tourism scholarship (Botterill, 2000:2001; Pansiri 2005:2006; all cited in Jennings, 2009).

Research Design

The research design considers options, makes suggestions and lays down details of the research for execution (Sarantakos, 2005). The relevance of choosing a research design is adherence to values with regards to the control of bias and maintenance of objectivity in terms of the research process itself and the conclusions drawn thereafter (Kumar, 2005). Easterly- Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) outlined five potential devices that researchers need to consider when choosing a research design (see Table 2).

Table 2: Suggesstions for Choice of Research Design

- Research is independent versus researcher is involved
- Large samples versus small samples
- Testing theories vesus generating theories
- Experimental design versus field work methods
- Verification versus falsification

Source: Easterly-Smith et al, (2002:43)

The current study's choice of descriptive research design is informed by these suggestions. In the view of Churchill (1999:16), the purposes of descriptive research are to: describe the characteristics of certain groups; estimate the proportion of people in a specific population who behave in a certain way; and make specific predictions. Lending credence to descriptive research design Sarantakos argues out its ability to "describe social systems, relations or social events, providing the background information about the issues in question as well as stimulating explanations" (Sarantakos, 2005:6).

The descriptive design can either be quantitative or qualitative using the logical method of inductive to deductive. Consequently, it seeks to find answers to *who, what, when, where and how* questions through the analysis of relationship between and among variables (Churchill, 1999; Zikmund, 2003).

Data and Sources

Both primary and secondary data sources were employed. Primary data were obtained from a field survey of tour operators who were registered with the Ghana Tourist Board. Such registration was considered because it ensured the authenticity of each tour operator's business in Ghana. Secondary source data were obtained from related literature on tour operators role such as Journal articles, books and bulletins obtained from the main library of the University of Cape Coast, the Departmental library of Hospitalty and Tourism Management and also the office of the Ghana Tourism Authority as well as the Internet.

Target Population and Sample Frame

The study population was all tour operators as travel intermediaries operating in Ghana. The targeted population was, however, tour operators who were duly registered by the GTA and Local government authorities such as District Assemblies and were members of TOUGHA operating in Accra. Like Carey and Gountas, (1997), whose total sample frame in their study was all top thirty U. K. tour operators, the sample frame for this study was made up of all tour operating companies located in Accra. Such a sample was informed by the fact that tour operators constitute a relatively small population among the various travel intermediaries in Ghana.

Sampling Procedure

Since the study was exploratory and mixed nature the non-probability sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents. Specifically, the purposive sampling procedure, otherwise known as the judgemental sampling (Sarantakos, 2005) was adopted. The choice of this procedure was informed by the fact that the tour operator business in Ghana was concentrated in Accra, the nation's capital. Obtaining a large number of respondents was not relevant to this study. Like Carey and Gountas (1997) the rational was to guarantee the approximate representation of all types and sizes of tour operators.

The researcher purposively targeted managers or CEOs of tour operation companies as the respondents who would answer questions as efficiently as possible and they, therefore, constituted the unit of analysis for the study. Once the group of respondents was identified the necessary information was obtained from them through questionnaires and interviews. As many as 85 managers or CEOs were captured in the survey.

Study Instruments

According to Sarantakos (2005), the questionnaire instrument has become the most popular survey tool among social scientists. It produces quick results and can be completed at the respondent's convenience. The anonymity of the respondent is also assured. This study employed the questionnaire approach to collect quantifiable data.

The questionnaire requested respondents to offer information in five areas (modules). Module A sought to collect data on profile of travel intermediaries in general. It investigated issues such as year of establishment, location of business, structure of ownership, and category of tour operation. Module B centred on Tour Operation Business in Ghana. It looked at key activities undertaken by tour opertors in the country, type of tourist products featured in the operations of tour operators in Ghana, how tour operators in Ghana market the country as a tourist destination, leading markets targeted by tour operaors in their operations, and average number of tours organised annually. The module also investigated tour operators relationship with the Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA).

Module C sought data on Tour Operators role as Travel Intermediaries in Ghana. The issues investigated included functions performed by tour operators, such as issuance and delivery of travel documentation, assembling of tourist products, assistance in legal requirements, provision of information. It also investigated ownership and use of the website. The likert scale was employed as a measuring tool to determine the role played by tour operators in Ghana. This approach has been employed by a number of researchers who did some studies on "role playing" (see Cohen, 1979; Pearce, 1985; Buhalis, 2000; Medina-Munoz & Garcia-Falcon, 2003). Respondents were required to indicate, using 5- point likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, the type of roles they play as intermediaries in Ghana's tourism business.

Using the same procedure, respondents were asked to indicate their reason for choosing Ghana as the location for their tour operation business in

Module D. Module D gathered data on reasons for locating tour operation business in Ghana. This requested respondents to give reasons why they decided on Ghana as heir business location. while Module E, the final module sought data on socio- demographic characteristics of respondents, specifically managers or CEOs of the tour operating organisations. The characteristics included sex of respondents, marital status, religion, business returns and educational background as these were considered to determine the level and success of business of the tour operator.

The questionnaire approach has its own limitations. Such limitations include the fact that the questionnaire does not allow probing. Also it does not lend itself to prompting and clarification of questions as well as the lack of supervision. To forestall the shortcomings of the quantitative approach using questionnaires, the qualitative approach was also adopted using the in-depth interview. As a supplement to the questionnaire, IDI of some twenty marketing managers as key informants of the organisations was conducted with prepared interview guide (see Appendix V). The interview was conducted on one-on-one basis. The responses were recorded and transcribed after the interview.

The interview was semi-structured in line with the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. While some questions were structured with some rigidity to serve as a guide, some were unstructured to allow for flexibility in the interview process. The interview consisted of ten (10) questions and it was conducted shortly after the retrieval of most of the completed questionnaires.

Items on the interview schedule mostly covered those in the questionnaire in order to substantiate information gathered from the questionnaire. Issues addressed in the interview included: prominent Ghanaian festivals featured in respondents' tour operations; specific contributions made by the Tour Operators' Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) towards tourism promotion in the country; relationship with other related organisations within the tourism industry; and specific airline collaborations etc, etc.

Such combination is in line with the assertion by Sarantakos that "interviews together with questionnaires make up the survey method which is one of the most popular techniques of social research" (Sarantakos, 2005:246). In other distribution channel researches the in-depth structured interviews constitute the main means of data collection which enables a rich vein of information to be captured (March, 1996; Buhalis,2000; Yamamoto & Gill,2002).

Ethical Concerns

Ethical issues were considered since it is important to adhere to ethical behaviour in any research. As such, ahead of the administration of the questionnaire and also the conduct of the interview the objectives were carefully explained to respondents and key informants. They were also assured of the anonymity of respondents covered during the field survey.

Training and Fieldwork

The study employed ten research assistants who took six days from April 10-16, 2010 to undergo the training session. The subject of training bordered on interviewing techniques, distribution and retrieval of questionnaires and establishing rapport with respondents. The procedure used during the training involved mock interviews among participants and testing of questionnaires on selected tour operators in Takoradi.

Pre-Testing of Instruments

The survey instrument was pre- tested in the last week of December 2010 on purposively selected tour operators in Takoradi. The delay in the pre-testing exercise after the training of research assistants was due to financial constraints. Such survey enabled the researcher to assess the suitability of the survey instrument for necessary modification to suit the actual fieldwork. Some probable problems to be encountered in the main field work were also unearthed for the necessary measures to be taken to overcome them. These included misunderstanding of some questions and respondents’ suspicion of the purpose of the survey.

Methods of Data Collection

The researcher booked appointment with the executives of the Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) to be allowed to distribute questionnaires to managers or CEOs or their representatives at one of their regular scheduled general meetings in Accra in May, 2011. He was assisted by one research assistant. By courtesy of the TOUGHA executives some of the questionnaires were left with them to reach other respondents who might attend subsequent meetings. In all, one hundred (100) questionnaires were given out. The executives were mandated to collect the questionnaires from respondents at subsequent meetings, to be finally collected by the researcher.

The researcher in turn made a number of visits to TOUGHA headoffice in Accra to finally collect the completed questionnaires from the executives. The data collection spanned a period of five months, that is, between May and October, 2011.

Informed by the contention of March, (1996); Buhalis, (2000); and Yamamoto and Gill, (2002) the study further sought interviews with the marketing officers of some of the tour operation organisations in Accra. This qualitative approach was to supplement the quantitative technique which employed the use of questionnaires owing to the scantiness of information available on tour operators in Ghana, as well as the exploratory nature of the study. The interviews were semi-structured around a check-list of questions which focused on the nature of operation, the markets targeted, contributions made by tour operators towards tourism promotion in Ghana and airline collaborations.

The interviews lasted about forty minutes on the average, taking a little longer time for some of the bigger companies and less time for some of the smaller, less complex ones. The researcher's assistants who were engaged took notes at each interview and in some cases recorded proceedings for possible play-back so as to capture the full details of the exercise.

Response Rate

For any survey, the most important issue is the response rate which determines the level of participation of the respondents. Under normal circumstances, a high non-response rate portrays the quality of the data. For this study, a total of one hundred (100) questionnaires were given to tour operators in Accra. Of this number, eighty-five (85) were returned, giving 85% response rate. The shortfall resulted from either respondents who failed to return their questionnaires or respondents who deliberately refused to co-operate perhaps for fear of exposing their business operations to the researcher. In all, 30 marketing officers were engaged in the interview exercise.

Data Processing and Analysis

The field data were edited for correction of errors and completeness. The data were then coded and fed into the computer. The analysis was done by the use of Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 16. The use of descriptive and inferential statistical technique was made.

This study adopted the likert scale with factor analysis with varimax rotation to examine the role of the tour operator intermediary in Ghana's tourism industry. This statistical technique is used in research to investigate interdependence relationships within a set of independent or dependent variables . It is best considered as a family of multivariate statistical technique rather than a single technique. The technique has been applied in marketing research in a variety of ways, including investigations of attitude change, liquor preference, and shopping patterns (Vavra, 1997). In terms of descriptive analysis the use of tables and graphs were made to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and profile of tour operators in Ghana.

Validity and Reliability

Both validity and reliability are applicable in either quantitative or qualitative research. While validity implies the ability to produce findings that are in agreement with theoretical or conceptual values reliability refers to the ability of an instrument to produce consistent results (Neuman, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005;). A research is, therefore, reliable if it is able to produce the same results whenever it is repeated either by the same researcher or other researchers. In the case of validity, a measure is valid if it is able to produce results that reflect the true situation and conditions of the environment it is supposed to study. In order to achieve reliability there must be precision and objectivity. Validity borders on empirical evidence while reliability is based on consistency.

The current study is of mixed design, hence, the issue of validity and reliability is of paramount significance. Measures were taken by this study to ensure validity. In the first place, the findings of the study were juxtaposed or compared to identical literature to establish the closeness or to what is real or otherwise. Attempts were made to define key concepts to show their levels of measurement that were expected. In the case of the qualitative aspect of design, interactive processes were employed to ensure or guarantee that the outcome of the in-depth interview were correct so as to address the issue of validity.

In order to address reliability certain control measures had to be taken . First, the researcher ensured that the interviews with respondents were the same throughout the session. It was ensured that the same respondents (CEOs) answered the questions throughout and that the questions were standardised.

The research assistants were given extensive training to comply with these directives in administering the interview schedules. There were constant checking of completed schedules to forestall any lapses. The items in the questionnaire were also structured in line with similar instruments employed by earlier researchers (Cohen’s, 1979; Pearce’s, 1982, 1985; Medina et al’s, 2003).

By so doing, even though original, there was the assurance that the outcome of this research was going to be consistent with others in the same field. This offered a platform for findings to be compared. In the final place, the pre-testing and consequent refining made it possible to arrive at a rigid instrument which could serve as a source of replication for further research on the subject.

Fieldwork and Related Challenges

The conduct of the survey was vitiated with a number of challenges. First, was the dispersed locations of tour operators in Accra as the capital. The travel jam in the Accra metropolis impeded movement from one tour operator office to another to conduct interviews and retrieve questionnaires from TOUGHA executives. The researcher had to overcome this obstacle in some instances by walking the distances on foot. Second, frequent excuses of “go and come another time” delayed the process of data collection. Third, was the reluctance of respondents to divulge information because of the sensitive nature of such a competitive business. All these made the collection of primary data a herculean task.

To overcome the problem of dispersed locations, the researcher used the scheduled meetings of TOUGHA members to administer the survey instrument since the sample frame involved all CEOs of tour operating companies available. Respondents were made to deposit completed questionnaires with TOUGHA executives for final collection by the researcher to forestall the challenge of frequent “go and come” syndrome. The interview sessions were conducted with assurances of anonymity so that respondents would be less reluctant to offer information required.

Summary

This chapter discussed the study area for the research and methodological issues relating to the study objectives. The study area was the Accra metropolis which covered Accra central and its suburbs. The chapter discussed the various methods adopted to collect data for the study. The research philosophy was discussed and this looked at the underlying principles behind social research. Also discussed in the chapter was the research design which touched on data collection methods used for the study. The chapter covered sources from which data was collected.

The target population as well as sampling techniques were discussed in the chapter. The chapter also covered the types of survey instruments employed to collect data for the study. The period taken to train research assistants for the field- work as well as the actual conduct of the field-work was covered by the chapter. The issue of validity and reliability was discussed. While validity was concerned with how true the results of the study could be , reliability looked at how the study's results could be identical if and when it is replicated.

The chapter also discussed the methods adopted in analysing the data collected from the field. Finally, the challenges encounted by the researcher during the field-work were captured by the chapter.The next chapter shall discuss respondents' characteristics and profile of travel intermediaries in the country.

CHAPTER SIX

BUSINESS PROFILE OF TOUR OPERATORS AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

This chapter deals with the business profile of the respondent tour organisations in Ghana as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of managers or chief executive officers (CEOs). The issues discussed have been structured under the following sub-headings: marital status; religion; income level; location; year of establishment; type of ownership; number of employees and type of tour operations. sex of respondents; educational background.

Profile of Business

Form of Business Ownership

The study sought to investigate forms of business ownership practised by the various tour operators in Accra. The findings showed that slightly more than half (54.1%) of the businesses were limited liability companies while a sizeable proportion (36.5%) were individually owned or sole proprietorship. Partnership, and public limited liability together accounted for only 9% which showed how very few these types were in the field of tour operation in the country (Table 3). Perhaps limited liability company type of business offered Ghana's tour operators better opportunities while those who could afford the capital but would like to go on their own were found in sole proprietorship to take full advantage of the prospects of the business.

There was a further investigation through cross-tabulation to establish relationship between educational background of respondents and form of ownership of the business being operated. The findings are portrayed in Table 5. The outcome shows that the calculated value of 0.8 is greater than the alpha or p-value of 0.05. This implies that there is no relationship between the two variables. The form of ownership of a tour operation business, therefore, is not determined by the educational background of the tour operator.

Furthermore, the study interrogated the relationship between business forms and employees engaged so as to determine the extent to which business forms influenced level of employment in tour operation. Cross-tabulation was used to establish such relationship (Table 4).

From the findings in Table 6 it can be said that there is no relationship between form of business and number of employees engaged. This is evidenced by the fact that, form of business notwithstanding, majority of the various operators engaged between 1-10 employees in their outfit.

Establishment of Tour Operator Business in Ghana

The study investigated how tour operation businesses were established in the country. Specifically, it sought to investigate the establishment of new businesses and acquiring existing establishments. The findings show that 91% of respondents established new businesses while the rest took over existing ones.

Table 3: Business Profile

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of Establishment		
1965-1975	2	2.4
1976-1985	3	3.5
1986-1995	12	14.1
1996-2005	51	60.0
2006-2010	8	9.4
No Response	9	10.6
Total	85	100.0
Type of Business Ownership		
Public Limited Liability Company	1	1.2
Limited Liability Company	46	54.1
Partnership	7	8.1
Individual/Sole proprietorship	31	36.5
Total	85	100.0
Business capacity		
Independent	51	60.0
Consortium	17	20.0
Part of a chain	12	14.1
No Response	5	5.9
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Period of Establishment of Business

The study probed respondents to indicate the period within which their tour operation businesses were established. Table 3 shows the findings. It was evident from the findings that majority (60%) of the tour operator businesses in Ghana started between 1996 and 2005. This confirms the fact that tour operation business in Ghana until 1996 was at its inception stages (Akyeampong, 2009).

Within the period 1986-1995 tour operator businesses in Ghana represented only 14.1% and this was the period after which Inter-Tourism Fair was organised in Ghana to showcase the country's tourism potentials. Showed that tourism in Ghana began to pick up after the Inter-Tourism Fair (GTB, 2005). The findings also confirm Akyeampong's (2009) remark that the number of travel intermediaries in Ghana continued to grow from 1985.

Table 4: Leading Business Forms by Level of Employment

Number of employees	N	Forms of business		
		Limited liability Company	Partnership	Sole proprietorship
1-10	59	60.5	71.4	87.5
11-20	21	34.9	28.6	12.5
21-30	2	4.6	0.0	0.0
Total	82	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Again GTB (2008), observed that there was a steady growth in the number of intermediary firms engaged in both travel agency and tour operations in Ghana between 1987 and 2007. These findings give credence to the results observed which also showed that majority of the tour operation businesses in the country came into being between 1996 and 2005.

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test significant difference between year of establishment of tour operation business and annual income or turnover. The test revealed that there was a significant difference between the year of establishment of a tour operation business and its annual turnover (P=0.005). This implies that the annual turnover of a tour operator differed based on the length of existence.

Table 5: Type of Business Ownership by Respondents' Characteristics

Individual Characteristics	N	Public Limited Liability	Limited Liability	Partnership	Individual/ Sole Proprietorship	Chi square (x^2)	P.value ($p \leq 0.05$)
Educational attainment							
Secondary/Commercial/ Technical	14	0.0	50.0	7.1	42.9	10.4	0.8
University	27	0.0	63.0	7.4	29.6	(df = 16)	
Other Tertiary	30	3.3	56.7	6.7	33.3		
Post Graduate	6	0.0	33.3	16.7	50.0		
Other	2	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0		
Religion							
Christian	79	1.3	55.7	7.6	35.4	12.7	0.12
Muslim	1	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	(df = 8)	
Others	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0		

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

A further analysis of the mean turnover of the tour operators based on their length of operations revealed that those established during 1986 and 1995 had the highest turnover (6.545) followed by those established during 2006 and 2010 (6.167), as well as 2001 and 2005 (6.010) (Table 7). Also, those established during 1996 and 2000 had higher turnover (5.343) than those established during 1965 and1975 (4.000) and 1976 and 1985 (1.333). It is, therefore, suggested that the Ghana Tourism Authority must keep proper records of tour operators in the country based on length of existence. This could inform the level of taxes that should be levied on the various operators in the industry to improve upon the records on tourism's contribution to the country's GDP.

Table 6: Period when Business was Established

Year	Frequency	Percentage
1965-1975	2	2.4
1976-1985	3	3.5
1986-1995	12	14.1
1996-2005	51	60.0
2006-2010	8	9.4
No response	9	10.6
	85	100.0

Source: Field work, 2011

Registration of Business

The study sought to investigate the agencies with which the businesses were registered. The data showed that nearly 79% of them were registered with the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) while a few (3.5%) were registered with the District Assemblies. About 18% of them however registered with both the Ghana Tourism Authority and District Assemblies. This situation implies that the GTA was not able to capture all tour operators in Accra.There appears to be lack of co-ordination between the GTA and DAs to track the total number of tour operators in the industry. Such situation does not allow for proper statistics on the number of tour operators in the country and the attendant roles they play in the economy.

Table 7. Relationship between Year of Establishment and Annual Income

Year of establishment	N	Mean	Std Error Mean	P value
1966-1975	2	4.000*	1.000	
1976-1985	3	1.333*	0.333	
1986-1995	11	6.545*	0.801	0.005
1996-2000	14	5.343*	0.355	
2001-2005	18	6.010*	0.401	
2006-2010	6	6.167*	0.311	

*=Significant difference

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Capacity Under which Tour Operator Businesses Functioned

There was an investigation as to the capacity under which the tour operator business was functioning. The findings showed that most of the tour operators preferred to operate independently (60%) while the rest (34.1%)

either preferred to operate under a consortium or be part of a chain. A few (5.9%), however, did not respond to this question.

The study further investigated relationship between ownership of business and capacity in which they operated. Table 8 shows the outcome. From the table the calculate value of 0.08 was greater than the alpha value of 0.05. This shows that there is no significant relationship between the two variable. That is, the capacity in which a tour operator facility functions does not depend on the type of ownership of the business.

Specialization in Business

The study sought to investigate the practice of specialisation in tour operation in Ghana. The data showed that about 64% of the tour operators in Ghana were both in-bound and out-bound tour operators while 34.1% were exclusively in-bound operators with only 2.4% being out-bound operators. The results indicated that perhaps it was safe not to specialise given the small size of the market (Akyeampong, 2009).

With in-bound operation the tour operator concentrates on in-coming tourists alone while the out-bound operator would also have to concentrate mainly on out-going tourists. Since tourism in Ghana is at its inception stage it appears the combination of both out-bound and in-bound operations make economic sense.The study sought to investigate relationship between sex and specialisation in tour operations, Table 9 shows the outcome.

The table shows both the calculated value and critical or alpha values. The calculated value of 0.025 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. This is interpreted to mean that there is a significant relationship between sex of respondents and area of specialisation in the tour operation business in the country.

Table 8: Form of Ownership by Tour Operator Capacity

Type of ownership of business	N	Type of tour operator			Chi-Square (X^2)	P-value (P>0.05)
		Independent (%)	Consortium (%)	Part of a chain (%)		
Public limited liability company	1	100.0	0.0	0.0	13.9 (df=8)	0.08
Limited liability company	43	62.8	23.3	14.0		
Partnership	5	80.0	0.0	20.0		
Individual/Sole proprietor	31	65.5	24.1	10.3		

Source: Field work, 2011

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Issues of age, sex, education marital status and income levels to some extent determine how effective a business person can be in the execution of his or her functions. The tour operation business is no exception. This part of the chapter, therefore, examines the background characteristics of the respondents in relation to their business operations. Cross-tabulation of selected socio-demographic elements were performed to determine how they relate to one another in the business of tour operation.

Sex of Respondents

The data showed that 54 (63.5%) of the sampled respondents were male and 27 (31.8%) were female. Four (4.7%) respondents did not indicate their sex. This shows that majority of the sampled tour operators in the study area were males showing some amount of gender imbalance in the business (Table 10).

Table 9: Identification of Business by Sex

Sex of respondent	N	Identity of business			Chi-Square (X^2)	P-value (P>0.05)
		In-bound tour operator (%)	Out-bound operator (%)	Both (%)		
Male	54	25.9	3.7	70.4	7.374	0.025
Female	27	55.6	0.0	44.4	(df=2)	

Source: Field work, 2011

Sex by Type of Business Ownership

The study shows that the majority of tour operators who operated as either Public Limited Liability companies (100%) or Private Limited Liability Companies (73%) were males while the rest (27%) were females. When it comes to Partnership majority (86%) were males with the minority (14%) of the owners being female operators. In the case of Individual/Sole proprietorship 52 percent of the owners were males while 48 percent were females showing an almost equal distribution of this type of business between the two sexes.

Marital Status by Type of Business

The findings show that all those who operated as Public Liability Companies were single while the divorced or separated as well as married couples showed no interest in this type of business. When it comes to Limited Liability Companies, there seems to be a wider (79.1%) participation by married couples than both the single (16.3%) and the divorced/separated (4.7%). While the divorced/separated did not show any interest at all in partnership, still the married couples dominated in this form of business, followed by the single operators. The trend is the same with sole proprietorship where most of the owners are married couples, followed by the singles and the divorced/separated showing no interest in participating in this form of business.

Educational Level

About 67% of the respondents had tertiary level education while the rest either had second-cycle education or tertiary. This pattern shows that tour operators in Ghana have acquired high level of education. This is in conformity with the view of 96.5% of the respondents who indicated that education was a pre-requisite for their business. The implication is that such level of education could have a positive influence on the success of their businesses since Ghana’s tourism at present is predominantly patronised by international visitors. Since most tour operation businesses in the country are in-bound operations it is very important for operators to have some sound educational background in order to handle foreign visitors effectively (Table 10).

Marital Status

The data showed that majority of the respondents (63.5%) were married while the rest were either single (27%) and divorced or separated (2.4%) (Table 10). The implication of this could be that operators in this business are people who had attained some maturity. The data could also suggest that married couples can be said to be more responsible businessmen and women since they had families to cater for and when this is put into the business operations it ensures a successful turn-over.

Religion

Almost all persons in the tour operation business in Ghana as represented by the sample study (80%) were worshippers of God. While 79% of the respondents were Christians only 1.2% were Muslims and 1.2 were of other faith. It was evident that people handling the tour operation business in Ghana were in the majority worshippers of God. This could have a positive influence in the way they handle tourists with a corresponding positive image for Ghana as a tourist destination.

The relationship between the tour operator's religion and type of ownership of business was investigated. The outcome is shown in Table 7. It is portrayed in the findings that the calculated value of 0.12 is greater than the alpha or p-value of 0.05. By interpretation there is no significant relationship between the two variables. The implication is that a tour operator's religious background does not determine the type of ownership of the business being operated (Table 7).

Education and Training as a Pre-Requisite for Travel Intermediary Business

The extent to which education was a pre-requisite for the tour operation business was investigated. Majority of the respondents (96.5%) responded in the affirmative while few (3.5%) felt it was not. This conforms to GTB requirements which make it mandatory for the manager of a tour operation organisation and at least one other officer to have successfully completed a course in tourism GTB (L.I.1293 of 1981) (GTB, 1987).

Table 10: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Individual Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	54	63.5
Female	27	31.8
No Response	4	4.7
Total	85	100.0
Educational attainment		
Secondary/Commercial/Technical	14	16.5
University	27	31.8
Other Tertiary	30	35.3
Post Graduate	6	7.1
Other	2	2.4
No Response	6	7.1
Total	85	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	23	27.1
Married	54	63.5
Divorced	2	2.4
No Response	6	7.1
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

An investigation to establish relationship between educational background of respondents and income earned in the business was made in the study. The findings show that the calculate value of 0.040 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. This implies that there is a significant relationship between educational background and income earned in the tour operation business. This is to say that annual income earned in the tour operation business in the country depend on the educational attainment of the operator.

Discussion

Most of the travel intermediaries in the industry combine tour operation with travel agency operations. However, there is quite a number of them who operate exclusively as tour operators while some also concentrate solely on travel agency operations. This is a confirmation of Akyeampong's (2009) findings that there are operational differences in the work of travel intermediaries. The strategy to combine tour operation activities with that of travel agency has come to be known as travel and tours.

As such one could identify such categories of travel intermediaries as tour operators, travel agents and travel and tours in the travel intermediary trade. The rational behind operating as travel and tour organisation could be traced to the fact that market for the business in Ghana is relatively small as most of Ghana's tour operators are mainly in inbound operation (GTB, 2001). According to Akyeampong (2009:14) " by registering as travel and tours, firms strategically position themselves to operate as both travel agency and tour operators".

In terms of period when business was established the survey showed that most of the businesses were established within the period 1986-2005. This also conforms to the findings of Akyeampong (2009) that " the sub-sector of the tourism industry which witnessed the most impressive rate of expansion during the period 1985-2006 was the intermediaries, i.e. tour operators and travel agencies". This is the period which followed immediately after the organisation of the Inter-Tourism Fair in the country. Within this same period, the 15-year Integrated Tourism Development Plan was launched by the Ministry of Tourism to give a boost to tourism development in the country (MOT, 1996).

The study showed that the highest growth rate among tourism service providers in the country was recorded between 1996 and 2005. Annual turn-overs of the businesses varied based on the period of establismment of the business as shown empirically by the ANOVA statistical approach. This is perhaps borne out of the fact that long established businesses gain more popularity and customer loyalty than new ones due to their period of existence.

In most cases, as captured in the findings, the sampled tour operation businesses are either limited liability companies or sole proprietorships with the majority operating as limited liability companies. Perhaps it makes more of economic sense to operate as a limited liability company in case the business collapses as compared to sole proprietorship. A few other companies, however, chose to operate as partnerships. This is perhaps due to the difficulty in assessing large capital for bigger undertakings.

The study could not establish any relationship between form of business ownership and the educational background of the operator. The form of ownership of a tour operator, according to the study is not determined by one's educational attainment. A tour operator who is only a secondary school graduate could own a business which is being run as a limited liability company and in the same vein a university graduate could also own the same form of business.

The findings also show that most of the tour operation organisations employed between one and ten people in their outfit. This is an indication that the tour operation business plays significant role in creating job opportunities in the country. This is a manifestation of tourism's impact on Ghana's economy in terms of employment which was estimated at over 183,000-269,000 per annum within the period 2006-2009 (Tourism Sector Medium-Term Development Plan, 2010-2013). This finding is consistent with that of Akyeampong (2009) whose study showed majority of travel intermediaries in Ghana having a permanent staff of 5-7 which is in the range of 1-10.

In an attempt to establish relationship between form of business ownership and number of employees engaged by a company the study found out that the form of business ownership has no influence on number of employees engaged by a tour operation company. This is evidenced by the findings which show that, form of business ownership notwithstanding, majority of the sampled companies employed between 1 and 10 staff. The number of employees could be influenced by other factors which could be further investigated other than form of business ownership.

The study found that the choice of specialising in the tour operation business in the country is determined by sex of the operator. It is, however, not clear as to which of the sexes, male or female is more into specialisation and which is more into generalisation. There is, however, no relationship between form of ownership of business and capacity in which tour operators function. The study, therefore, found that how a tour operation business operates, being it independent, consortium or part of a chain, does not determine the form of business enterprise, that is, limited liability, partnership or sole proprietorship.

From the findings of this study there is a male dominance of the tour operation business in Ghana. This suggests that gender-wise males seem to be more interested in the tour operation business than their female counterparts. This, however, runs contrary to the general phenomenon in the country where apart from services and sales and also elementary occupations it is found that there is male dominance in most occupations involving professional and managerial functions (Ghana Statistical Services, 2012). The finding suggests that even though the tour operation business is service oriented, its very nature might not make it attractive to female participation.

Most respondents had attained tertiary level education, either from the university or other tertiary institutions with a few of them holding post-graduate qualifications. This perhaps explains the positions they occupy as CEOs or managers of their organisations. This is consistent with the reqirement of the GTA that at least one of the top management members should have a tertiary qualification. A manager or CEO of an organisation such as tour operation needs to be a person with high educational attainment as they usually interact with foreign visitors and undertake some travel documentations**.**

There is also male dominance in all the types of business as shown by the findings. This shows that the female operators shun Public Liability ventures while their male counterparts largely cherish it. The female operators, however, show some interest in the Limited Liability operations which are not public. Again the female interest in the Partnership type of business is not encouraging as compared to Sole Proprietorship where almost equal percentage distribution of ownership was recorded.

The study shows that most of the sampled female tour operators are not married. They are not under any control of married partners. On the other hand, most of the male practitioners are married with only few being single. The pattern of marital status vis-à-vis sex suggests that female practitioners may prefer to be independent while their male counterparts may prefer having married partners. Such partners perhaps could support the men by handling most of the household chores while the men concentrate fully on the business with little support from the female partner. By nature and by Ghanaian tradition women are supposed to economically depend on men but not the other way round.

The ownership distribution pattern of marital status among the various forms of business show that apart from Limited Liability ventures, married couples dominate in the other forms of business, followed by the singles with the least participation in all the other forms of business coming from the divorced/separated. The pattern suggests that married couples are not interested in public ventures since they could pull resources together to go private and also operate as a family venture.

The study found that annual income earned by tour operators in their business does not depend on sex of the operator. This implies that a male tour operator could either earn the same income as their female counterparts or even earn more or less. Nonetheless, the study could not determine which of the sexes perform better in the area of income earning. However, in terms of educational background, the study was able to establish some relationship with annual income.

It was found that the annual income earned by a tour operator is determined by his or her educational attainment. A majority of the CEOs or managers were married couples with family responsibilities. A relatively small number were single and this might have represented the younger generation who had acquired higher academic qualification for the positions they occupy.

Members of the Islamic faith, according to the outcome of the survey, are not attracted to the tour operation business. This is evidenced by the low percentage representing that group. Perhaps the low representation of muslims attests to the fact that the Islamic and other faiths frown on tourists behaviour as was observed in the literature. According to Page, Bunt and Connel (2001: 282), “In the Gambia, predominantly muslim population, female tourists who wear tight clothes, shorts or mini-skirts and men wearing short-sleeved shirts are viewed as indecent”. They also referred to Zambia where they contend that “Islamic beliefs are offended by improper tourist clothing and behaviour” (Page, et al, 2001:282).

It came out of the study that form of ownership of the tour operation business, being it limited liability company, partnership or sole proprietorship is not related to the operator's religious background. One's religion therefore does not determine how a tour operation company must be owned. It means, therefore. that a limited liability company or partnership could either be owned by a Christian, a moslem a Buddist or a traditionalist.

The organisations refused to disclose their annual returns on business. This is perhaps considered a sensitive issue with regards to the competitive nature of the business. Out of those who volunteered information, over 20% earn above 20,000 Ghana cedis per annum. This is indicative of the fact that the tour operation business is an avenue for income generation, thus confirming the claim by the Ministry of Tourism that "tourism has proven its case as a serious income generating economic sector......" (MOT/MCC, 2003:5).

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANALYSIS OF THE TOUR OPERATION BUSINESS IN GHANA

Introduction

This chapter analyses thefield data on business practices of tour operation in Ghana. The analysis covers average number of tourists encounted annually, international tourists handled annually, leading international markets targeted by tour operators, membership of intermediary organisations, ancillary service providers, airline collaborations and attractions and festivals in Ghana featured in tour programmes.

Handling of Tourists

The average number of both domestic and international tourists handled by individual firms on yearly basis was investigated, the findings are captured in Table 11.

Over 100 tourists were handled yearly by 41.2% (35) of those who responded to this question. This is the highest number while the lowest number (1 – 20) was captured by 3.5% of the respondents. However, 35% (30) of respondents failed to respond to the enquiry perhaps for fear of disclosing their business secrets. The number of tourists handled annually by tour operators could be quite substantial since some operators remained tight-lipped on disclosing figures. Even those who responded might have deliberately reported low figures as a result of the secrecy syndrome. The use of the in-depth, however, enabled the researcher to obtain some responses to this enquiry.

Table 11: Number of Tourists Handled Per Year

Number	Frequency	Percent
1-20	3	3.5
21-30	4	4.7
41-60	3	3.5
61-80	1	1.2
81-100	9	10.6
101 and above	35	41.2
No response	30	35.3
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Volume of International Tourists

The study probed further to find out how many of the tourists handled each year by the tour operators were international visitors (Table 12). Only 54% of respondents volunteered information on this item. Of those that provided the information, 2.4% handled more than 200 international tourists which was the highest number. The lowest number(1- 20)of international tourists was recorded by 12.9% of the respondents. The distribution showed that only a few operators handled more than 100 international tourists to Ghana annually while the majority handled 1-20. Studies have shown that, world-wide, the proportion of domestic tourists outnumber that of in-bound travellers by a ratio of 10:1, generating only 3.65% times that of in-bound receipts.

Table 12: International Visitors Handled Annually by Tour Operators

Number	Frequency	Percent
1-20	11	12.9
21-39	7	8.2
40-59	6	7.1
60-79	6	7.1
80-99	6	7.1
100-119	1	1.2
120-139	1	1.2
140-159	3	3.5
160-179	2	2.4
180-199	1	1.2
200 and above	2	2.4
No response	39	45.9
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

International Markets Targeted by Tour Operators

On the leading international markets targeted by tour operators, it emerged that the European and North American markets were the leaders (Table 13). The data showed the three foreign markets targeted by the tour operators. While the North American market showed 24.7% of respondents who featured it, the European market recorded 21.2%. African countries which constituted the regional market showed only 2.4% of respondents. This partly confirms the findings of Withers (1995) that North American and European markets were the top foreign markets for Ghana's tourism.

Table 13: Leading International Markets

Markets	Frequency	Percent
European market	18	21.2
North American market	21	24.7
Regional (African countries)	2	2.4
No response	44	51.8
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Surprisingly, nearly 52% of respondents did not offer any information on this enquiry. As earlier stated, this is perhaps the result of the usual unwillingness to disclose business secrets or it was due to the book-keeping systems on business activities. It is on record that tour operators in Ghana receive a chunk of their income from foreign visitors since domestic visitors tend to avoid the use of travel intermediaries (Akyeampong, 2007). This explains why respondents were unwilling to show their leading foreign markets. The outcome of the in-depth interview, however, confirmed that the North American market was top among the international markets featured by the country's tour operators.

Business Returns

Close to one-third (31.8%) of the repondents refused to indicate the category of income within which their organisation fell in terms of returns. Perhaps this could be attributed to the sensitivity of such disclosure and the implications for the competitive nature of the tour operation business. Of the 68.2% who responded 47.1% fell within the revenue bracket of 20,000-35,000 Ghana cedis annually and above while the rest fell within 5,000-20,000 Ghana cedis. This suggested that while some were doing quite well in the business others were not doing well. The disparity could be traced to several factors including size of business, level of investment and marketing strategies.

Capital is the bed-rock of any business and as such people with huge capital investment are likely to expand their businesses faster than those with low capital investment. The corresponding turn-over would therefore reflect the level of investment. Promotion of business through such tools as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations enhances successful operation of business but such undertakings require large capital expenditure and only those organisations in the high revenue bracket are likely to exploit such advantage.

The study went further to investigate the relationship between sex of respondents and annual income earned in business, using cross-tabulation. The findings are shown in Table 14. The table shows that the calculated value of 1.0 is greater than the alpha or P-value of 0.05. By interpretation the two variables have no relationship. It means that the income earned by a respondent has nothing to do with his or her sex. In other words the income does not depend on the respondent’s sex, being male or female.

Table 14: Category of Income Bracket by Sex

Sex	N	Category of income bracket								Chi-Square (X^2)	P-value (P>0.05)
		Less than 5000000	5000000-9999999	10000000-14999999	15000000-19999999	20000000-24000000	25000000-29000000	30000000-34000000	35000000 and above		
Male	39	5.1	12.8	5.1	7.7	15.4	10.3	12.8	30.8	1.9	1.0
Female	19	5.3	5.3	5.3	15.8	21.1	10.5	10.5	26.3	(df=7)	

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Tour Operators Choice of Attractions and Activities in Ghana

The study sought to find out attractions in Ghana patronised by tour operators in targeting tourists to the country. Ecotourism and heritage tourism emerged prominent in their responses (Table 15).

In all, almost 86% of the respondents provided information on this issue. It emerged that about 79% considered ecotourism and heritage tourism to be the top two attractions for their businesses (Table 15). The least of the activities were recreational and cultural which together captured 2.4% of the responses. Adventure tourism placed third with 4.7%. These findings conform to that of Withers (1995) who observed that Ghana is rich in historical attractions which are interlinked with cultural attractions.

Perhaps the linkage between the two might be the reason for the low response on cultural attractions. He also mentioned that even though Ghana could not compete with East and Southern Africa in Safari tourism due to animal population, the differing ecosystems, natural attractions, and distinct flora and fauna provide sufficient opportunities for Ghana (Withers,1995).

Table 15: Major Attractions and Activities in Ghana for Tour Operating Business

Attractions	Frequency	Percent
Ecotourism	39	45.9
Heritage	28	32.9
Recreational	1	1.2
Adventure	4	4.7
Cultural	1	1.2
No response	12	14.1
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

He also mentioned 15 national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and nature reserves, out of which only Mole and Kakum National parks were receiving meaningful numbers of tourists.

Ghanaian Festivals Featured in Tour Programmes

In order to effectively probe this issue the researcher adopted the interview method. This approach facilitated a face-to-face interaction where respondents' body language and facial expressions as they responded to the interview items could be observed. The semi-structured interview bordered on finding out specific festivals featured in the tour operators' programmes.

Prominent among the festivals mentioned were Odwira (Akwapim), Bakatue (Elmina), Hogbetsotso (Anlo), Fetu Afakye (Cape Coast), Homowo

(Accra), Aboakye (Efutu) and Akwesidae (Asantes and Kwahus) Some less prominent ones mentioned included Akwantukese (New Juabeng), Damba (Dagomba) Asafotufiam (Ada), and Dipo (Adangme).

There was a further probe to find out the rationale for the patronage of specific festivals. In many cases the interviewees were unanimous in their reasons. Prominent among the reasons given were that: "the festivals were staged at times that coincided with tourists' peak season" ; another interviwee observed that: "it was because the festivals appealed to our clients"; and "the rich cultural nature of the festivals" was the observation of one other interviewee. Other reasons were that their choices were informed by the unique nature of the festivals and the suitability of festival dates. Another set of quoted reasons given by respondents during the interview were: "the visitors enjoyed the teachings on the slave trade"; "the fetivals bring people together"; A few of them added that they used such festivals to promote their own regions while others too said that they used the selected festivals to boost the country's tourism industry.

Tours Operations

The average number of tours operated by respondents on annual average basis was investigated. Out of the total number of respondents, 59.0% volunteered information on the number of tours they operated annually. Of the number that responded 31.8% operated between one and five tours annually. Another 13.0% operated between 16 and 20 tours annually on average while 10.7% of the respondents operated between six and 15 tours annually (Table 16).

Table 16: Number of Tours Operated Annually

Number	Frequency	Percent
1-5	27	31.8
6-15	9	10.7
16-20	11	13.0
21 and above	3	3.6
No response	35	41.2
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

The sensitive nature of the tour operation business continued to hunt the respondents as they refused on a number of occasions to disclose vital information for the survey. For instance, the study sought to know the number of tours brought into the country over the past five years. Less than half of the respondents provided information. The number of tours operated, according to the few who responded, ranged between one and 20. This response was confirmed from the outcome of the in-depth interview from which one interviewee lamented: “the global economic crises is affecting our business; I hardly operate beyond ten tours annually”.

With regards to the corresponding number of tourists brought into the country by such tours within the same period, 48% of the respondents provided information. The number of tourists also ranged between 4 and 500. This confirms the assertion over two decades ago by GTB (1987) that, travel intermediaries in Ghana do very little in organising excursions and tours, but rather merely deal in air- ticketing and hardly stimulate in-coming tourism from generating markets.

There was a further probing question as to the last time respondents promoted tourists to Ghana. The outcome is depicted in Table 17.

Table 17: Last Time Tourism was Promoted in Ghana

Period	Frequency	Percent
The last three months	35	41.2
The last six months	13	15.3
The last nine months	2	2.4
The last twelve months	9	10.6
Other	6	7.1
No response	20	23.5
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

The data showed that 56.5% promoted tourists to Ghana for the past three to six months prior to the survey while (13%) did that for the last nine to 12 months. This outcome seems to suggest that Ghana's tour operators are now stepping up their promotion of international tourists to Ghana. Perhaps this trend could be due to a shift from what used to be the case in the mid-1980s when the involvement of local companies in in-bound travel was very insignificant (GTB, 1987).

This change in trend could have been precipitated by the improvement in air traffic to Ghana as evidenced by the steady increase in the number of international airlines with landing rights at the Kotoka International Airport. According to GTB records the number of airlines that have been landing at the airport from foreign countries rose from 14 in 1998 to 20 in 2000 and fell back to around 15 between 2002 and 2010. Another reason for the shift could be the increase in investment cost on tourism projects from the late 1990s to date (GTB, 2003). Such development could offer opportunities to tour operators to undertake more promotional activities.

Membership of Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA)

The study also covered the activities of TOUGHA. The main issue bordered on membership of the association and aspects of its functions and its contribution to tourism promotion in the country. While 12 members remained adamant to this enquiry, 73 volunteered information. Out of the number that provided the information, 51.8% confirmed being paid-up members of TOUGHA while 34.8% indicated that they were not members.

Previous studies by Akyeampong (2009) and Amuquandoh and Amenumey (2008) had observed that not all tour operators in Ghana were members of TOUGHA. It also confirms the view of Akyeamong (2009) that membership of TOUGHA was optional but not mandatory. As a trade association, TOUGHA was formed in November 2009 to help members cope with changes taking place in the international tourism market and provide direction. It is given the mandate to improve standards locally and promote Ghana.

Specifically, the objectives of TOUGHA include bringing together registered tour operators and fostering good working relationship among them; forming a strong lobby group to influence legislation; contributing to tourism development and ensuring high standards; creating awareness for domestic tourism and finally liaising with international tourism organisations and societies (www.tougha.com).

TOUGHA Membership and Annual Revenue

The study sought to establish the relationship between membership of TOUGHA and the annual revenue earned. A t-test was employed for the analysis. The t-test indicated that there was no significant relationship between annual revenues earned by respondents who were members of TOUGHA and those who were not ($p=0.725$). An examination of the mean scores indicated that the annual income of TOUGHA members (1.333) was not significantly different from that of non-TOUGHA members (1.200).

TOUGHA's Contribution Towards Tourism Promotion In Ghana.

This study sought to find out specific contributions made and activities undertaken by TOUGHA towards tourism promotion in Ghana. The following were some of the quoted statements by respondents in an in-depth interview (IDI):

- "We brainstorm ideas during conferences";
- "We issue bulletins and offer support to our members";
- "The Union donates money for the maintainance of tourist infrastructure like the Elmina Castle";
- "We organise familiarisation tours";
- "The Union markets Ghana through promotions and attendance at tourism fairs";
- "We organise training programmes for our members"; and

- We create awareness and set standards for operators in the industry".

Some of the respondents were unanimous on the view that they organised tours, educated people on environmental issues, and contributed towards transport services. Others were also emphatic that they organised domestic tourism and essay competitions on tourism issues among school children in the country. Another observation made by the participants was that they participated in FAM tours (trade promotion fairs) both domestic and international where they exhibited some of Ghana's tourist products in pictures, brochures and video clips. One interviewee also noted that they obtained incentive packages from government on imported cars which enhanced their operations.

While some of these observations by respondents can be corroborated by this researcher others cannot be said to be truly happening on the ground. For instance, the researcher can confirm that, indeed TOUGHA members organise essay competitions among school children as he himself once participated in the assessment process of such exercise. Even though TOUGHA has, as one of its objectives, the organisation and promotion of domestic tourism it appears that not much of this has yet been achieved. This could be attributed to the lukewarm attitude of Ghanaians towards touring of places.

Membership of International Intermediary Organisations

On the issue of membership of international intermediary organisations, the study found that respondents belonged to various associations such as IATA, ASTA, and UFTAA. The desire to belong to such organisations could have been informed by the fact that membership of such organisations enriches the curricula vitae (CVs) of the respondents for recognition. According to Akyeampong (2009:8), "A licence by the International Airline Transport Association (IATA) is a great boost to a travel intermediary and firms invest substantially in human resource training as well as facilities in order to qualify for an IATA licence". He went on to say that membership of IATA attracts higher levels of commission for a firm. It is on record that as at 2006, only 24% of tour operators in Ghana possessed IATA licence (GTB, 2008).

Membership of International Intermediary Organisations and Annual Income

The t-test statistic was employed to establish the statistical significance of the relationship between membership status of international intermediary organisations and annual income. The result revealed that there was no significant relationship in terms of a tour operator's membership of an international organisation and the annual income earned ($p=0.082$). This implies that the annual income of the tour operators did not depend on membership of an international organisation. The mean annual income of tour operators who belonged to an international organisation (5.000) did not differ significantly from that of those who did not belong to any international organisation (6.035).

Contractual Agreement with Other Organisations

The research findings showed that some tour operators in Ghana had some linkages, either vertical or horizontal, with other organisations both inside and outside the country. Most of such organisations were airlines, car rentals and trade associations. Key among them were the Car Rentals Association of Ghana (CRAG), Ghana Travel and Tours Association (GATTA), airlines, Exper Travel, Travel King, Amadeus and Galileo, Sabre/Galileo and Hotel groups.

These collaborations were, however, not integration as is the practice in developed markets where "integration has taken place between sectors of the tourism industry" (Holloway et al, 2009:62). In the view of Akyeamong (2009) several travel intermediary firms in Ghana choose to remain independent in line with the strategy of self-sufficiency, despite such apparent drawbacks as low capitalisation for expansion and unlimited liability. Being independent of course, according to Tribe (1995), has the advantages of personal motivation, supervision and flexibility.

Tour Operators and Tourism Organisations in Ghana

The study probed relationships of tour operators with some identifiable tourism organisations in Ghana such as Ghana Tourist Board (GTB), Ministry of Tourism, Ghana Tourist Development Company (GTDC), Ghana Association of Travel and Tours Agencies (GATTA). Respondents were required to state 'Yes' or 'No' to either confirm or refute any such relationship (see Fig.6).

Nearly 93% of respondents had something to do with GTB through registration while a small percentage (7.1%) were yet to relate to the Board in terms of registration. According to Amuquandoh and Amenumey (2008), in Ghana, 'a tour operator' refers to a person or organisation that has been licensed by the Ghana Tourism Authority to handle tour packages. By such definition any person or organisation operating tours in Ghana without the approval of the GTA is not recognised as a tour operator enterprise.

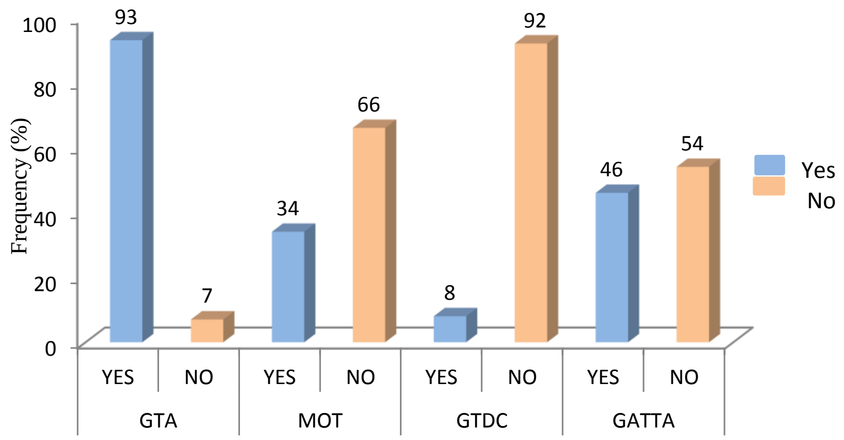

Figure 6: Relationship with other Tourism Organisations in Ghana

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

However, Akyeampong (2009) observed that generally a tour operator is a firm that organises tours to both domestic and international destinations and engages in related services such as tour guiding. Such a firm, according to Akyeampong, must satisfy the GTB's mandatory requirements. The views of these researchers go to confirm the findings of the current study where majority of the respondents were registered with the GTB.

With regards to the MOT majority of the respondents did not relate to the tourism ministry. While about 66% responded in the negative, 34.1% responded in the affirmative. Perhaps the outcome suggests that the ministry has no direct control over the tour operators as compared to the GTA. This is a reflection of the relationship between GTA and MOT/DR whereby the MOT/DR formulates policies for the GTA to implement (Medium Term Development Plan 1993-95).

The findings also showed a minority (8.2%) of respondents relating to the GTDC while the rest (91.8%) did not relate to them. This is perhaps because the role of GTDC as handling public investments in the tourism sector has either little or nothing to do with the tour operator sector which remains a private sector enterprise. **A**n appreciable percentage (45%) of respondents had some relationship with GATTA while 54% had no relationship. The outcome confirms the fact that some tour operators practise both as travel agencies and tour operators, that is, travel and tours. It is, therefore, not surprising that almost 50% of respondents hadsome relationship with this association.

The study resorted to an indepth interview (IDI) in view of the desir obtain more information on the benefits respondents obtained from their relationships with the relevant organisations. Most of the respondents were of the view that such organisations influenced their policy direction and offered business advice. One interviewee observed: "we obtain assistance on legal issues; we also provide brochures". There was a concensus among interviewees that such relationships made it easy for dissemination of information as well as benefiting from periodic training of staff.

One suggestion provided during the interview was that the needs of the operators were met through the relationships with such organisations. Another issue raised by the respondents was that they were able to speak with one voice which gave them solidarity to fight for their interest. One manager was quick to mention that: “we receive accreditation from such organitions as recognised agencies”. Other views unanimously expressed by the participants were that the Ghana Tourist Authority (formerly Ghana Tourist Board) assisted them to organise their tours regularly and also organised some refresher courses for them.

From the various views expressed by the interviewees it can be concluded that benefits obtained by tour operators in associating themselves with these myriad of organisations were diverse and varied. Nonetheless, they were all geared towards the upliftment of their businesses through a united front. In the words of Amuquandoh and Amenumey (2008) these organisations serve as conduit for lobbying as well as complementing the efforts of international organisations.

Tour Operators and Ancillary Services

The vital role of such mediators in the intermediary business as observed by Holloway et al (2009) and Mill and Morrison (2009) prompted this study to investigate the use of ancillary service providers such as couriers, tour guides, animateur, financial service providers, incentive travel firms and duty-free shopping centers. The findings of such investigation is presented in Fig. 7. The figure shows the extent to which tour operators in Ghana engage the services of other service providers in their business. Twenty-five per cent

(25%) of the respondents indicated that they made use of such ancillary service providers while majority 70.6% of respondents did not engage their services. Perhaps the low level usage of these service providers in the business was influenced by the need to cut down on costs as suggested by Holloway et al (2009).

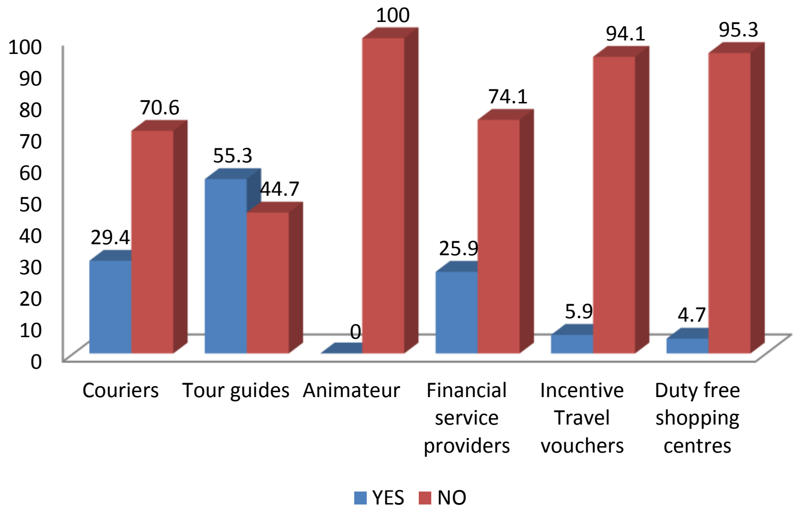

Figure 7: Ancillary Service Providers and the Tour Operator

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Given the invaluable service provided by tour guides as indicated in the literature the study sought to find out the extent to which tour guides were used by tour operators in Ghana. The findings are encapsulated in Fig. 7. Out of the 85 respondents, more than 50% affirmed their use of tour guides in their business. Most of these guides, according to the findings, were freelance workers while a few of them were permanent employees which conforms to Holloway's findings (Holloway et al, 2009). This is an indication that with regards to job implications in Ghana more opportunities were available in tour guiding than couriership.

The ancillary role of animateurs has informed the present study to find out the degree to which tour operators in the country involve animateurs in their business operations. It emerged that none of the respondents engaged the services of animateurs in their operations. This may perhaps be due to either cost minimisation imperatives or the infant nature of Ghana's tourism industry as a whole and the tour operation business in particular. Even in advanced countries where tourism is relatively mature there is the tendency to avoid the use of ancillary service providers as a means of cutting down costs (Holloway et al, 2009).

The extent to which tour operators in Ghana engage the services of financial service providers was also studied (see Fig 7). The findings depict that the use of financial service providers does not appear to be popular in tour operating practices in Ghana. This is evidenced by the low proportion (25.9%) of respondents who indicated their patronage of such service providers.

The current study probed further to find out the extent to which tour operators in the country utilise the services of Incentive Travel Vouchers as obtains in other countries (Fig. 7). The use of such package appeared to be insignificant among the country's tour operators. Only six per cent of the respondents indicated their use of such package. This suggests that the tour operation business in Ghana is at its infant stage and as such the use of such packages to motivate employees appears to be absent in their operations.

The study also sought to find out the degree of involvement of duty-free shops in tour packaging programmes of Ghana's tour operators (Fig. 7).

From the figure, it is obvious that the involvement of duty-free shops in the business of Ghana’s tour operators is almost non-existent. This is evidenced by the insignificant number of respondents (4.7%) who made use of such facility. It can be inferred from these findings that in-coming tour operation is not popular with the practitioners in Ghana. This is because such a facility is normally patronised by out-bound tourists who purchase duty-free items either at the airports of their homes of origin or on aircrafts in transit. This confirms the claim by the GTB (1987) that Ghana’s tour operators are mainly engaged in ground handling activities and ticketing.

Collaboration with Airlines

Informed by the collaboration in intermediary practices in advanced countries, this research investigated the extent to which tour operators in Ghana link up with other tourism service providers particularly airlines in their operations. In absolute terms, 67 respondents out of the targeted 85 volunteered information on this issue. More than 50% of those who responded affirmed their linkage with some airlines.The result shows that the tour operators do collaborate with some airlines but as pointed out by Akyeampong (2009) there was no ownership or subsidiary relationship.

In the in-depth interview this issue was probed to find out those airlines which were involved in such collaborations. The following responses came from the interviewees: “We collaborate with Alitalia, Air Ivoire, Aero”; Another said: “We collaborate with Thumai, Air T Chad, Alitalia, KLM, British Airways”; One interviewee also observed: “We do business with Ghana International Airline, North American Airlines and all major airlines”.

The study sought in the interview to find out the kind of collaboration between the tour operators and the airlines. The following were some of the responses: “We receive commissions through partnerships”; “We set discounts on airfares or tickets”. Another respondent said: “there is business collaboration between us”; “One also noted: “We do reservations and sell their tickets; we also do group ticketing for the airlines”. Others said they collaborated on contractual basis and fare discrimination. Prominent among the responses was the sale of airline tickets. Repondents were unanimous on the fact that they received commission or bonus on purchasing of tickets.

Specialisation in Tour Operation

The issue of specialisation in tour operation was noted by Withers (1995) and Holloway et al (2001) in the literature. Based on such observation this study sought to interrogate the practice of specialisation among tour operators in Ghana. Respondents were asked to state the leading market among given options which they featured in their operations. (see Table 18). The total number exceeded the sample size as a result of multiple responses given by some respondents. Foreign holiday makers ranked highest among the leading markets of operators with absolute number of 39 responses.

This confirms the findings by Withers (1995) and GTB (2010) that visiting friends and relatives (VFR) records the highest number of foreign visitors to Ghana. Local holiday makers are the next leading markets for the tour operators as evidenced by number of responses (29). Such local holiday makers are present in the country during public holidays and festivities such as Easter, Christmas, Independence and Republic Day celebrations. Excursions are undertaken by such holiday makers to attraction sites such as sand beaches, lake side and waterfalls. Foreign businessmen and organised groups are the least among the leading markets, each capturing only 22 responses in terms of absolute numbers.

However, it can be observed from the table that the differences in number of responses are small. This suggests that respondents do not consider specialization as very important in their operations. Almost equal number of respondents were recorded against each market.

Table 18: Leading Markets of Specialisation

Leading Markets	Number	Percent
Local Businessmen	28	20.0
Foreign Businessmen	22	15.7
Organised Student Groups	22	15.7
Local Holiday Makers	29	20.7
Foreign Holiday Makers	39	27.9
Total	140	100.0

Source:Field Work, 2011

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to test differences between the leading markets of the various tour operators and the annual incomes they earn from their operations. The ANOVA test revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the leading markets and the annual income ($P = 0.035$). This implies that the annual income of various tour operators depended on their leading markets.

The Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) method, one of the common post hoc procedures, was used to identify tour operators that had different annual income based on their leading markets. The result of the test is presented in Table 19. The result indicates that tour operators who had organised student groups as their leading markets had a statistically significant different annual income (4.298) from those that had local holiday makers as their leading markets (3.924) as well as those that had foreign holiday makers (5.824).

Table 19: Leading Market and Annual Income

Leading market	n	Mean	Std Error Mean	P value
Local business men	28	4.464	0.486	
Foreign business men	9	4.444	0.973	
Organised student groups	14	4.298*	0.496	0.035
Local holiday makers	17	3.924*	0.400	
Foreign holiday makers	17	5.824*	0.543	

Scale: *=Significant difference

Source: Field Work, 2011

Discussion

Most of the operators were able to handle an average of 100 tourists annually in their operations. On international tourism, however, few of the practitoners were able to hit over 400 tourists annually on the average. These findings suggest that tour operators in the country need to step up their international operations to increase the current international tourism receipts in Ghana which stands at over six million US dollars ($6m) GTB (2008).

One of Ghana's marketing objectives is to increase the number of foreign holidays and conference visitors to Ghana in order to increase foreign exchange earnings, employment opportunities and other socio-economic benefits. The projected international tourists arrivals in Ghana by 2010 was put at 1,062,000 (ITDP/MOT,1996). This projection could, however, not be attained. This could be the result of inadequate in-bound promotion activities. The findings vindicate the claim by the GTB that tour operators among other intermediaries are handicapped when it comes to handling of large in-bound groups. According to the GTB (1987), the travel intermediaries merely deal in air- ticketing and do very little in organising tours (GTB, 1987).

The current study showed that the highest number of foreign visitors to Ghana was recorded by those visiting friends and relatives (VFR).This is explained by the fact that some Ghanaians live and work in foreign countries in Europe, USA and Asia. These people do join their relatives for the celebration of events such as christmas and annual festivals. This confirms the observation by Withers (1995) and GTB (2008). According to the study, there is the need for tour operators in the country to step up their operations to even handle both more of domestic as well as international tourists to boost tourism development in the country.

The North American and European markets were found to be the leading international markets for the sampled tour operators. This could be attributed to the historical link between Africa and Europe in terms of trade and North America in terms of the African-Americans who trace their ancestral descent to Africa. This shows that regional markets on the continent of Africa are not prominent in their operations. This confirms the fact that

African nations are noted to be recipients rather than generators of tourism (Akyeampong, 2007). This perhaps explains why most of the country's tour operators are into in-bound operations rather than out-bound. The unwillingness of the majority of the tour operators to disclose their leading foreign markets could be due to the tendency to keep certain operations in business secret to themselves since they are in competition with others.

Ecotourism, heritage tourism, and adventure tourism in that order appeared in the findings to be the most leading attraction types in Ghana for tour operation business. Tourists seem to be attracted to the country more because of the natural and heritage environment than recreational environment. This could be attributed to their love for the natural environment and the link between cultural and historical attractions as observed in the analysis. Festivals are also important avenues for tour operators in promoting tourism in the country. The findings highlighted festivals such as Odwira, Hogbetsotso, Fetu, Bakatue, Homowo and Aboakyir prominently featured by tour operators in their practices.This gives credence to assertions by some researchers that traditional events give a boost to the travel industry in Ghana (see, for example, Amenumey, 2000; Akyeampong, 2009).

Most of the tour operators were registered with TUOGHA, the trade association. According to the findings, members derived a number of benefits from the union which enhanced their operations. Membership is, however, optional as the study showed that not all tour operators belonged to the union.Since membership is optional tour operators were not legally bound to belong to the union.

Sampled tour operation organisations did not operate in isolation. The study showed that most of the operators relate to other tourism organisations in the country such as the GTA (formerly GTB), GTDC, GHATTA and MOT. Their relationships are, however, found to be highest, in relative terms, with the GTB and MOT. This is due, perhaps, to the fact that the operations of their businesses are controlled by these two bodies who are responsible for the formulation (MOT) and implementation (GTA) of tourism policies in the country which affect their businesses. Such relationships are imperative for the successful functioning of tour operations.

The respondent tour operators also link up with some ancillary service providers such as couries, tour guides, financial services and incentive travel voucher providers as observed by Holloway et al (2000). The usage of these service providers is however limited in the country's tour operations. The implication of this finding is that there is a disparity between the use of couriers in advanced countries and Ghana in tour operations. For instance, in the United Kingdom couriership provides some avenue for job opportunities which attract even university graduates with relevant qualifications in languages. The same, however, cannot be said of Ghana where less than fifty percent (50%) of tour operators engage the services of couriers.

Again the low level of patronage of financial service providers by the country's tour operators suggests that the majority of the tour operation business in Ghana is centred on in-bound, ground handling operations (GTB, 1987). In such services the tour operator may not need the services of financiers since the tourists go through those arrangements before leaving their home of origin. The findings in connection with the low level usage of ancillary service providers suggests that the tour operation business in the country is at its teething stage as compared to those in the advanced economies.

Tour operators in the country belonged to various international organisations such as IATA and ASTA.This is seen as a means of enriching their curriculum vitae (CVs) for international recognition. One finding in the study showed that instead of collaborating with other service providers such as the airlines as is the case in advanced countries, Ghana’s tour operators operate independently. This, perhaps, is due to the desire to be strategically self-sufficient even though this strategy leads to low capitalisation for expansion of business.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY ON THE TOUR OPERATION BUSINESS IN GHANA

Intoduction

This chapter deals with the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in tour operatons in Ghana. It discusses the impact of the ICT on the business of tour operations in the country.The discussion centred on areas such as ownership of websites, duration of functioning of websites, major reasons for using websites in tour operation, The chapter also looks at competition from the website to tour operation and type of ICT relevant to tour operation.

Information and Communications Technology and Tour Operation

Internet use in travel operations has become a new phenomenon in the travel and tourism industry. Knowm as the e-commerce or e-travelling the Information and Communications Technology is being highly adopted by many of todays tourists as observed by Chiu (2001). The Internet as a tourism distribution channel has become both a blessing and a curse to traditional travel intermediaries such as travel agents and tour operators.

Websites and Tour Operation in Ghana

Informed by the role of the Internet in travel distribution, the present study investigated the use of the WWW among tour operators in Ghana. The areas of enquiry included the extent of Website ownership among tour operators and also the three most important reasons for using a Website. The use of websites by respondents as captured in the field work was positive for all operators (Table 20).

It can be seen that 55.3% owned the facility with 40.0% not owning. Akyeampong (2009) observes in his findings that over a third of travel intermediaries in Ghana had websites of their own. He noted however that the internet was popular with travel agencies who mostly engaged in ticketing and reservations. Perhaps the situation in Ghana could be a reflection of the findings in a survey by National Tour Association of USA in 1996. The survey showed that only 17% of tour operators had a website in 1996, increasing to 63% in 2000 (NTA, 2000 b).

Table 20: Ownership of Websites.

Owing website?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	47	55.3
No	34	40.0
No response	4	4.7
Total	85	100.0

Source:Field work, 2011

According to the findings, an additional 25% of tour operators were expected to have a website by the end of 2001. In the view of the World Tourism Organisation Business Council (2001), websites offer opportunities for large and small tourism companies to increase their revenues in a cost-effective fashion.

The study also covered the level at which type of ownership of business affects ownership of a website (Table 21). The findings show that there was a higher level (51.2%) of website usage among tour operators who operate as limited liability companies compared to those who operate as individuals or sole proprietors (30.2%). Family owned tour operation businesses are the least users of the website. Perhaps the pattern of use is an indication that those operators who deal with large volumes of tourists supplement their efforts with the use of a website. It could also be attributed to financial constraints on the part of the least users.

Functioning of Websites

In order to ascertain the effective use of the website by the respondents the study inquired from them to state how long their web sites had been functioning.

Table 21: Type of Business Ownership by Website.

Type of Business Ownership	Use of Website	
	Yes	No
Public limited liability company		3.2
Limited liability company	51.2	51.6
Partnership	14.0	3.2
Individual/sole proprietorship	34.9	41.9
Total	100.0	99.9

Source: Field work, 2011

Only 55% of the respondents provided answers and, out of that proportion of respondents, 25.9% indicated that their web sites had been functioning for more than two years while 15.3% said it was between one and two years, with about 12% indicating that it was less than one year (Table 22).

Reasons for Using Information and Communication Technology In Tour Operations

Respondents were further requested to state the three most important reasons for utilising a website in their operations. The multiple response showed 54 respondents who indicated that marketing was either their first or second most important reason for utilising a web site (Table 23).

Another 45 respondents stated that provision of information about different tourist destinations was either the first, second or third most important reason. Areas such as online reservation, collection of customer information, provision of continuous service and gaining new customers were not popular with respondents. The pattern therefore suggests that tour operators prominently use their websites for marketing and building customer data base.

Table 22: Duration of Web Site Functioning

Period	Frequency	Percent
Less than one year	12	14.2
Between one and two years	13	15.3
More than two years	22	25.9
No response	38	44.7
Total	85	100.0

Source: Field work, 2011

The outcome of this investigation conforms to the views of Law et al (2004) who contend that the Internet offers an effective means for developing a single and sustainable electronic infrastructure for information gathering and business transactions for both travellers and suppliers. They further maintain that suppliers can carry out one-on-one marketing and mass customisation whereby suppliers can understand each customer's needs, and therefore target each customer individually and deliver tailor-made products. Respondents' views were sought to either confirm or refute a suggestion that the ICT offers some competition to their operations. While 67.7% agreed that they faced competition from the website, 35.3% disagreed.

Table 23: Three Most Important Reasons for Utilising a Website (N=85)

Reasons	Most important reason	Second most important reason	Third most important reason	Total frequency
Marketing	44	10	0	54
To provide information about the diff	11	28	6	45
Tourist destinations	3	5	20	28
Online reservation/sales	0	7	8	15
To collect customer information	0	2	6	8
To provide customer service	0	4	16	20
To gain new customers	0	0	0	0

Multiple responses

Source: Field work, 2011

The Tour Operator and Competition from Information and Communications Technology

A further question allowed respondents to make open-ended responses to indicate the form of competition offered them by the ICT in their business. The outcome is shown inTable 24.

Table 24: Competition from the Website

Form of competition	Frequency	Percent
Access to information	17	20.0
Increase market share	13	15.3
Online marketing and sales	9	10.6
Total	39	45.9
No response	46	54.1
Total	85	100.0

Source:Field work, 2011

The assertion by the majority that their operations faced competition by the website confirms similar observations by several studies including those by Block et al (1996), Rachman and Richins (1997), Poon (2001) and Law et al (2004). Rachman and Richins agree that travellers by-pass traditional intermediaries to do their own bookings following the boom of the online travel industry. Corroborating this assertion, Poon observes that as a consequence to the online travel departments, business competition for traditional travel agencies has increased. Law et al (2004) also argue that the Internet has become an electronic intermediary which is a new communication and distribution channel for e-travellers and suppliers of travel services and products.

Even though the majority of respondents mentioned the competition they faced from online businesses, less than 50% of them were willing to give instances of the forms of competition they faced. Most of those who responded to that question cited “access to information” as one of the challenges. This represents the view of Law et al (2004) who maintain that the Internet offers an effective means for information gathering and business transactions for both travellers and suppliers.

Relevance of Information and Communications Technology to Tour Operation

A further investigation requested respondents to indicate the types of ICT that were relevant to their business as tour operators (Table 25). Computerised Reservation System (CRS) (48%) emerged as the most relevant ICT type to the operations of the tour operation business. The other types of ICT that seemed insignificant to their operations as compared to the CRS since the two other types accounted for only 7.1%. This finding conforms to the claim by Mill and Morrison (1998) that the electronic distribution of travel services is now a major trend around the globe and that one aspect is the increased use of CRS and Global Distribution Systems (GDS) by travel trade intermediaries, carriers and suppliers.

Probing further, the study sought to ascertain the correlation that existed between the information intensive nature of the tour operation business and the adoption of the ICT by tour operators. Nearly 59% of the respondents gave affirmative responses with only 12.9% responding in the negative. However, 28.2% of the respondents remained adamant.

The evidence here lends credence to the view expressed by some authorities that with the emergence of the Internet, the process of fast information transmission can be addressed effectively at a low cost (Christian, 2001; Poon, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Respondents were further requested to react to a suggestion that ICT enhances the actual quality of information in terms of reliability, accuracy and detail. About 61% acceded to the suggestion while 5.9% of the respondents disagreed.

Table 25: Types of Information and Communication Technology Relevant to the Tour Operator Business

Types	Frequency	Percent
View data	5	5.9
CRS	41	48.2
Front and back office management system	6	7.1
Non response	33	38.8
Total	85	100.0

Source:Field work, 2011

The assertion by majority of respondents is an endorsement of the view shared by Christian, (2001), Poon (2001) and Buhalis and Licata (2002), who contend that ICT enables tourists to receive comprehensive, timely and relevant information in a virtual environment to assist their decision-making process.

Discussion

The use of the ICT is increasingly becoming relevant in the tour operation business in the country. The majority of the respondents own websites, especially those operating as limited liability companies. The study showed that ownership of websites depended on type of business unit and this explains why there was higher patronage by some types of the firms such as the limited liability companies than the other business units.

Marketing and information appeared to be the most important reasons why the organisations patronised the ICT in their operations. Most of the operators admitted in their responses that they faced competition by the WWW. This finding confirms those of Buhalis et al (2001), Rachman and Richins (1997), Poon (2001) and Law et al (2001) who all opined that the traditional intermediaries face a threat of disintermediation.

The Computerised Reservation System (CRS) is the most relevant type of ICT to the business of tour operations in the country. This is mostly seen in the bookings of room accommodation and airline seats in advance. There is some correlation between the information intensive nature of tour operation business and the use of ICT by tour operators. The admission by tour operators that the ICT enhances the quality of information with regards to reliability and accuracy testifies the important role played by the ICT in tour operations.

CHAPTER NINE

TOUR OPERATOR INTERMEDIARY IN GHANA

Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of tour operation practices in Ghana. The analysis is largely on key activities undertaken by tour operators in Accra, which translates into their role in tourism development. The discussion has been structured under sub-headings such as promoting domestic tourism, tourist products that are featured in promoting tourism in Ghana and procedures employed by tour operators to market Ghana as a tourist destination.

These are analysed by the use of frequency tables and graphs. Factor analysis was used to extract major roles played by tour operators in promoting Ghana's tourism industry. Again, factor analysis was employed to determine the underlying factors that informed tour operators decision to establish such business in the country.

Activities Undertaken by Tour Operators in Ghana

A frequency table was used to portray the key activities undertaken by tour operators in the Accra Metropolis. The findings are depicted in Table 26. There were a total of 188 multiple responses. From the table, 29.8% of the operators in Accra made special arrangements for individual travellers while another 20.2% undertook special arrangements for business travellers. Some 50% of tour operators in the study area were involved in making special arrangements for both leisure and business travellers.

Table 26: Activities Undertaken by Tour Operators

Activities	Frequency	Percent
Organizing conferences and congresses	19	10.1
Making special arrangements for business travelers	38	20.2
Handling activity, holiday or vacation trips	37	19.7
Handling youth travel trips	12	6.4
Handling special interest trips	5	2.7
Providing guides, couriers. Etc	21	11.2
Making special arrangements for individual travelers	56	29.8
Total	188	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

It was observed from the study that prominent activites undertaken by tour operators in Ghana were the making of special arrangements for both leisure and business travellers, handling of activity, holiday or vacation trips, and organisation of conferences and congresses. The less popular activities by the tour operators were handling special interest trips and provision of tour guiding and courier services.

Tourist Products Frequently Featured in Promoting Ghana to Tourists

Investigating this issue, respondents were made to state the tourist products which they mostly featured in their operations to promote Ghana's tourism. The multiple responses by respondents were captured in Table 27.

Table 27: Tourist Products Featured to Promote Ghana as a Destination

Product	Frequency	Percentage
Leisure tourism	46	27.0
Business tourism	42	25.0
Adventure tourism	40	23.8
Ecotourism	36	21.4
Others	4	2.4
Total	168	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Leisure tourism appeared as the most popular product featured by respondents (27.4%). The next prominent product was business tourism (25.0%). This implies travelling to attend meetings and conferences. Adventure tourism was the third prominent product (23.8) while eco-tourism was the least (21.4%).

Ghana as a Tourist Destination to the International Market

The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (CIM, 2005). Kotler (2003:16), on the other hand, holds the view that "marketing consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfaction more effectively and efficiently than competitors". Marketing is therefore considered by the current study as a vital instrument employed in selling Ghana as a tourist destination. Informed by this consideration, the study sought to investigate the promotion tools employed by Ghana's tour operators to market Ghana as a tourist destination. The findings are shown in Table 28.

Table 28: Strategies for Marketing Ghana as a Tourist Destination

Marketing procedures	Frequency	Percentage
Issuing brochures	57	34.3
Trade show participation	24	14.4
The World Wide Web	40	24.1
Trade journals	19	11.4
Advertising in the media	26	15.7
Total	166	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

The issuing of brochures came out as the most prominent tool (34.4%.) employed by tour operators in marketing Ghana as a tourist destination. This is shown by the multiple responses by respondents in Table 28. The WWW was the second most prominent marketing tool as evidenced by the findings, which perhaps gives credence to the findings of various studies (Christian, 2001; Poon, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Advertising in the media, participating in trade shows and the issuing of trade journals were on the average given almost equal prominence by respondents. These findings also conform to those of Holloway and Robinson (1995) and Harms and Katz (1996) cited in Akyeampong (2007) about the use of such marketing tools in tour operation.

The Website which has become a modern Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tool recorded 24.1% as the second most prominent marketing tool employed by the respondents. The other marketing strategies such as participation at trade shows, trade journals and advertising in the media on the average were given almost equal prominence by respondents, with advertising slightly ahead of the other two. Perhaps there are cost implications since businesses normally aim at cost minimization practices.

Organisation of Domestic Tours

The study sought to investigate the extent to which respondents involved themselves in organising domestic tours in Ghana as a means of promoting the industry (Table 29). As shown in the table, majority organised a maximum of three domestic tours annually. The results indicate that the highest percentage (58%) of respondents promote the tourism industry in Ghana through domestic tourism. The rest gave no response to this enquiry. As to how often such tours were organized in a year, the highest number of tours organized in a year was 6 and was done by only 4% of the respondents. A range of 1-3 tours a year was organized by a total percentage of 41.1.

A further analysis of the role of Ghana's tour operators prompted this study to apply the likert scale and factor analysis statistical technique to identify the underlying factors that translate into roles played by tour operators in Ghana (see Appendix I).

Table 29: Frequency of Domestic Tours Organized by Pespondents

Product	Frequency	Percentage
Once a year	12	14.1
Two times a year	8	9.4
Three times a year	15	17.6
Not often	11	12.9
Six times a year	3	3.5
Non-response	36	42.4
Total	85	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Eighteen factor roles were provided in a statement form for respondents to indicate each case on a likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, namely: 1- Strongly Disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Undecided; 4- Agree; 5- Strongly Agree, their degree of agreement or disagreement to each of the eighteen statements, (see Appendix I) . The factor analysis was performed on the eighteen role statements. In order to simplify the initial factor matrix to produce a more interpretable and unique factor structure the varimax rotation was performed. The result is shown in Appendix III. The use of factor analysis identified 7 key roles played by tour operators in the country (See Table 30).

The underlined factor loadings are the most salient loadings on each factor. A cut-off of 0.40 was used for item selection. A factor is defined by its loadings. The larger a factor loading, the larger its contribution to a factor or in other words, the larger the factor loading the greater the degree of association between the variable and the factor.

For a cut-off, all role statements under each factor which loaded 0.40 and above were considered and selected as the most salient loading on that factor. These statements are given interpretation to represent that factor. This has been done to generate the seven factors in order of ranking from factors one to seven (Table 30).

From the table it can be seen that seven factors accounted for 77% of what constitute the role of tour operators in Ghana. This is the cumulative percentage. Perhaps the percentage unaccounted for may be attributed to other unknown role factors which could also be investigated in other studies. Personal security for tourists while in the country and free inland transport could be some of the hidden factor roles.

Factor one which represented travel arrangements produced the highest loading. The implication of this result is that facilitation of travel arrangements is a leading role played by tour operators in Ghana.

The second factor role shows that tour operators in the country assess the quality of facilities and promote particular products with the co-operation of suppliers of such products or packages. This is consistent with what is contined in tourism literature as one of the roles played by tour operators (Yale, 1994)..

Factor three was on tour planning and education. It shows that in Ghana, tour operators play the role of planning tours, undertaking preparation for tours and also offering education to their clients.

Table 30: Ranking of Factors I

Factor	Eigenvalue	Pct of Variance	Cumulative Pct
1	2.700	15.003	15.003
2	2.220	12.335	27.337
3	1.930	10.725	38.062
4	1.915	10.641	48.702
5	1.905	10.563	59.265
6	1.624	9.002	68.288
7	1.570	8.723	77.011

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

The fourth factor borders on pre-purchasing risks. It implies that tour operators in Ghana assume some risk when purchasing products in advance. They also promote distressed capacity in low period at the last minute while at the same time handle complaints for both the tourists as their clients and the tourism industry.

Factor five identifies provision of information as one of the roles of tour š in the country. It implies that tour operators give out leaflets and brochures. videos, compact discs (CDs) to guide consumers, and at the same time conduct pre-experience and post-experience marketing research.

Offer of ancillary services was the sixth factor. It imphies that tour operators in Ghana offer ancillary services in areas of insurance cover, visa acquisition, and currency exchange to their clients and also offer legal assistance to them when necessary. This issue of tourist safety has been alluded to by Abane and Kendie (2000) when they observed that safety on our roads should be guaranteed to make tourists enjoy their visits in comfort and peace.

The seventh factor was the identification of consumer needs. It shows that in Ghana tour operators play the role of matching consumers' needs with products and facilitating communications between consumers and suppliers.

Reasons for Undertaking Tour Operation Business in Ghana

The study performed a second factor analysis with varimax rotation of eight statements concerning reasons that informed the decision of a tour operator to establish this business in Ghana (Appendix II). Ghana as a developing economy is known to be a net recipient of tourism but not a generator. The study sought to investigate, therefore, the extent to which this circumstance informed the decision of operators to locate in Ghana and engage in in-bound tour operations which is an area of specialisation (see also Wynne et al, 2001; Holloway et al, 2009;).

As usual, a cut-off of 0.40 loading under each factor was considered the most salient loadings on that factor (Table 31). This generated two main factors which were interpreted in the table. (see Table 32).

The two factors together explained 54.5% of the reasons for locating tour operation businesses in Ghana. The remaining percentage could perhaps be explained by other reasons that need to be investigated in further surveys.
The first factor was Ghana's development as a tourist destination. This finding conforms to the observation by Abane and Abanga (2003) that foreigners such as African Americans perceive Ghana as a suitable tourist destination.

Table 31: Results of Factor Analysis on Reason Statements

Reasons /Statements	Factor loadings	
I am a Ghanaian national	-.281	-807
Favourable investment climate	.588	.219
Ghanaian is a popular tourist destination	.793	.076
I am in a joint ventureship with Ghanaian national	.610	-.054
Ghana is accessible to major international tourist markets	.485	.533
Ghana has calendar of special events	.654	.353
The proverbial Ghanaian hospitality	.301	.631
There is adequate information regarding tourism facilities, prices and services in Ghana	.816	.029

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

This shows that tour operators are being attracted to do business in the country owing to the prevailing conditions in Ghana as contained in Ghana's Investment Code of 1985, in terms of tourism development. Factor two was promoting Ghana as a tourist destination. This shows the desire of tour operators to promote the country as a tourist destination.

Table 32: Ranking of Factors II

Factor	Eigenvalue	Pct of Variance	Cumulative Pct
1	2.844	35.554	35.554
2	1.515	18.940	54.494

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Discussion

The findings show that the issuing of brochures was the most prominent strategy adopted by tour operators in the country to promote Ghana as a tourist destination. This suggests that the brochure is a powerful promotion tool in tour operations in the country. The prominence given to the brochure by respondents in this survey confirms the views held by Yale (1995) and Holloway et al (2009) that the brochure is a prominent tool in marketing of destinations.

Some activities such as making of special arrangements for both leisure and business travellers, handling of holiday or vacation trips and organization of conferences and congresses are undertaken by tour operators. This suggests that such activities are the ways by which tour operators in Ghana link tourists to the country. Engaging in such activities perhaps, enables tour operators in the country to facilitate movement of tourists during their tour of destinations.

Through such roles by tour operators in the country these tourists are able to access tourist destinations.The findings conform to those of Lapage and Cormier (1977), McLellan and Noe (1976), Bitner and Booms (1982) who observed in the literature that such activities are ways of linking tourists to destinations. This concept is shared by Ioannides (1998) and also consistent with the view of Holloway et al (2009).

Tour operators handle special youth travel and special interest trips.They also provide guides or couriers and other ancillaries. These activities by some tour operators demonstrate the philosophy of travel intermediation as exemplified by the current study's conceptual framework.

The tour operator is positioned between the supplier of the travel product and the consumer. The investigation came out with some prominent products featured by tour operators to promote Ghana as a tourist destination. The pattern of distribution among these products show that almost equal opportunities were provided for the products in their promotion activities.

The element of specialization was missing. Perhaps the adventure tourism offered visitors the opportunity to climb to the peak of mountains such as Afadjato which is the highest mountain in Ghana, and walk on the canopy walkway at Kakum, and visit Nzulezu.The eco-tourism product on the other hand gives them the opportunity to visit some of the prominent waterfalls in the country such as Boti and Wli Falls and National Parks such as the Mole Park and Shai Hills.This is seen as creating attractive destination images as observed by Lapage and Cormier (1977), Morrison (1987) and Rachman (1997). Perhaps such images could be achieved by identifying the tourist products or a destination and using them as a bait to attract target markets.

Organisation of domestic tourism did not appear to be very frequent by respondents. This could be the result of Ghanaians lack of interest in embarking on tours which does not eem to be part of the Ghanaian culture. This confirms the assertion by Boakye & Owusu-Mintah (2008) that there was a neglect of domestic tourism in the country relative to international tourism owing to the much needed foreign exchange generated by the latter. This vindicates the claim by TOUGHA members that encouraging domestic tours was one of the prominent objectives they sought to achieve.

The use of factor analysis identified seven (7) key roles played by tour operators in the country. (see Appendix III). The first role which came out of the findings implies that tour operators facilitate travel arrangements by tourists. This perhaps makes it easier for some tourists to secure some travel documents and book their flights. This finding confirms that of McIntosh, cited in Mill and Morrison (2009), Buhalis (2001), and Middleton and Clarke (2001) who all attested to such facilitation role played by tour operators in their studies in other destinations.

As one of their roles, tour operators assess quality of facilities. This suggests that tour operators help travellers to have access to the best of facilities as they embark on their tours. These facilities could include hotel accommodation, restaurants for feeding and inland transportation facilities. This role played by tour operators in Ghana conforms to the findings of Stern and El-Duporny (1992) who also identified such role played by tour operators.

Planning and education are not peculiar as roles to tour operators in Ghana as other researchers such as Bennet (1993). Alcazar Martinez (2000) also observed similar roles played by tour operators in their studies of other tourist destinations. The issue of pre-purchasing risks is consistent with other findings by some researchers such as Lapage and Cormier (1989), Ioannides (1998), Wanhill (1998). Holloway et al (2009) and Middletonand Clarke (2001) who confirm this role by tour operators in the advanced tourist destinations.

The findings show that tour operators in Ghana provide information for their clients. Visitors may need to know where to secure certain services such as accommodation, various attraction sites, modes of inland transportation facilities available in the country, offices of the Ghana Tourism Authority among others. Tour operators, by the nature of their work, are best suited to provide such information to their clients. Thisconfirms the findings of McLellan and Noe (1976), Harris and Katz (1986), Cuoghlan et al (2006) and Mill and Morrison (2009).

In addition to the findings of these authorities, however, the tour operators in Ghana also provide videosand compact disks (CDs) to guide consumers and at the same time conduct pre-experience and post-experience marketing research. The implication of the consensus of this finding and that of the previous researchers on information provision is that such role is not restricted to tour operators in Ghana since the previous studies were conducted in advanced countries.

The study also came out with the finding that provision of ancillary services is one of the roles played by tour operators in their operatons in the country. The provision of such services as courier, tour guiding and finance is essential to tourists as it facilitates their movements during their tour. This has been corroborated by William and Richter (2002) in the literature. This is an indication that similar role functions are performed by tour operators elsewhere.

The role of identifying customer needs has been found in this study. This shows that tour operators in the execution of their functions try to identify the needs of their customers so that they can satisfy them accordingly. This is an underlying principle of marketing which gives credence to the findings of Coughlan et al (2006), Bachri (1994), Middleton (1994), Kotler et al (2003), Buhalis and Laws (2001) and Matinez (2002). This suggests that even though tour operators in Ghana are plying their trade in a developing world environment,they play identical roles with their counterparts in developed economies.

A second factor analysis on reasons for operating business in Ghana came out with two main factor reasons. These are Ghana"s development as a tourist destination and the desire to promote Ghana as a tourist destination. This has been alluded to by Abane and Abanga (2003) when they observed that foreigners form certain images about Ghana which could be used as a strategy to promote the country. The first reason shows that Ghana's level of tourism development has been recognized by tour operation businesses and other investors to do business in the country as tour operators to further promote the destination.

Such a finding confirms Cavlek's (2002) findings that tour operators have an influencial and powerful role in directing international flows from generating markets to various destinations. This role could contribute to increasing international inflow of tourists into Ghana. This reason which conforms to the findings of Brown (2002) shows how tour operators see Ghana's tourist attractions and the proverbial Ghanaian hospitality as powerful means to promote the country's tourism.

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the thesis is provided. Conclusions that have been drawn from the findings are outlined. The chapter also offers recommendations for policy and practice as well as suggestions for further research.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role played by tour operators as travel intermediaries in Ghana's tourism development. The data collection for the study was accomplished by the use of the mixed method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative approach involved the use of in-depth interview to supplement the quantitative approach which employed the use of questionnaire in a field survey both of which provided the primary data.

The secondary data was collected through journal articles, text-books, bulletins from the University of Cape Coast main library, Departmental library of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism and the Ghana Tourism Authority library in Cape Coast. The analysis of data was done by the use of frequency tables, chartsnd statistical techniques such as the factor analysis, cross-tabultion and t-test, using the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS), version 16.

Main Findings of the Study

The study has been guided by the conceptual framework adopted "the distribution functions for packaged tour model". In line with the framework, as well as the objectives of the study and research questions posed, a summary of the findings has been provided.

1. The philosophy behind travel intermediation has been demonstrated by the study's framework which positions the tour operator between the travel product supplier and the consumer of the product. The tour operator purchases the product of individual suppliers which he combines and sells with a range of other products to consumers who purchase a single all-inclusive product. The activities of the tour operator involves sorting and bundling of information, advice, negotiation, booking, payment and transfer of title. These are delivered as a single product to the consumer either directly or through travel agents. The suppliers are seen to be selling while consumers are seen to be buying the product.
2. The major activities undertaken by tour operators in the country were the making of special arrangements for individual and business travellers and handling activity, holiday or vacation trips. The issuing of brochures and use of the website came out as the major marketing tools employed by respondents to promote Ghana as a tourist destination.
3. The study showed that majority of the tour operators combined tour operation with travel agency business (known as travel and tour). A sizeable number of participants solely engaged in travel agency work while the rest were solely engaged in tour operation. The majority of the businesses were found to be operating as limited liability companies with

minority operating as sole proprietors with few others operating in other forms of ownerships.

4. While a large number (60%) of the sampled oraganisations operated as independents some operated as consortium and others as part of a chain. Again the findings showed that a large number of the organisations operated as both inbound and outbound operators while some operated solely as in-bound organisations with very few of them operating as solely outbound operators.

5. The findings further showed that the North American and European markets were the leading international markets featured by majority (45.9%) of the respondents in the tour operation business. The regional markets on the African continent were not prominent in their activities.

6. Eco-tourism and heritage tourism came out as the top two tourist attractions in Ghana patronized by tour operators. The study also found that festivals such as Odwira, Bakatue, Hogbetsotso, Fetu and Aboakyire are among the prominent ones featured by tour operators in their programmes.

7. Membership of TOUGHA (the Trade Association for tour operators in Ghana) was found to be optional. Even though not all tour operators belonged to the association, the majority of the sampled respondents were members. Key among specific contributions made by TOUGHA towards tourism promotion included: brainstorming of ideas, issuing of bulletins, donation of funds towards infrastructural development and marketing of Ghana as a tourist destination. Tour operators in the country also belonged to various international intermediary organizations. Prominent among these organizations were IATA, ASTA and IFTAA.

8. The findings also showed that tour operators in the country did not operate in isolation. They had linkages with other organizations such as airlines, car rentals and trade associations such as GATTA and hotel groups. They also relate strongly to MOT and GTA.
9. Finally, foreign holiday makers came out as the leading market patronized by tour operators in terms of market specialization. The majority of the tour operators were found in the study to own websites. The impact of the ICT on the tour operation business was found to be a two-edge weapon. While most of the operators complained that the ICT offered them some competition others were equally of the view that their websites were used in facilitating their marketing activities.

Implications of the Study

In line with the study objectives and research questions, a number of implications of the findings has been identified.

One implication of the findings is that the tour operators product offered for sale is a single all-inclusive product which is obtained through the sorting and bundling of various products.

Tour operators make special arrangements for business and individual travellers which enable them overcome travel difficulties.

Tour operators in Ghana do not in the main do tour operation alone. Instead, they combine tour operation wth travel agent business, hence their business is well defined as travel and tours.

Most of the tour operators in Ghana do not operate as individuals but rather they operate as limited liability companies.

The North American and European markets are the top markets for Ghana's tour operators.

The findings show that the most popular tourist attractions patronised by tour operators in the country are eco-tourism and heritage tourism. Membership of TOUGHA, which is a Trade association for tour operators in Ghana is not mandatory, rather it is optional. One decides either to be a member or not.

One finding of the study points to the fact that the introduction of Information and Communications Technology in travel intermediation poses a threat to the survival of the business of tour operators.

Conclusions

Following the findings of the study which are based on empirical processes, a number of conclusions has been drawn.

There is the conclusion that tour operators in Ghana handle a number of both local and international tourists annually. They also undertake variety of activities in their operations. The activities undertaken by the tour operators include facilitation of travel arrangements for tourists, tour planning and preparation and provision of travel information to tourists.

Tour operators provide the travel information through leaflets and brochures and assessment of quality of products. It is also concluded from he findings that the tour operation business in Ghana has various types of ownership structures. These include limited liability companies, partnerships and sole proprietorships.

The Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) contribute to tourism promotion in Ghana in various ways. They promote the country as a tourist destination through participation in international tourism fairs. The union, according to the findings, market Ghana as a tourist destination by means of issuing brochures and leaflets. The tourism products mostly featured by the tour operators in the country include annual cultural festivals, eco-tourism and heritage tourism.

One conclusion from the findings of the study is that the Information and Communications Technology is both a blessing as well as a curse to tour operation activities in the country. The final conclusion from the findings is that while the ICT enhances the performance of tour operators it also offers competition as an electronic intermediary.

Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

Reflecting on the contribution made by the current study to knowledge, it can be said that, unlike earlier studies on travel intermediaries in Ghana which bordered on the generality of travel intermediaries (Amuquandoh & Amenumey, 2008; Akyeampong, 2009) this study focused on tour operators in the distribution chain. The study which is an exploratory one, investigated and came out with the specific roles played by tour operators in tourism development and promotion in Ghana.

Again, studies elsewhere which also focused on tour operators (Bitner & Booms, 1982; McLellan & Noe, 1976; Harris & Katz, 1986) limited their work to tour operators' role within the tourism industry. They, however, did not look at the role played by the operators outside the industry. The present study went further to investigate the contributions made by tour operators to the society as their corporate responsibility. The findings showed that tour operators, through their union (TOUGHA) organised essay competitions among students in the country's educational institutions at the basic level.

One other area of contribution by the current study is the use of statistical tools to establish relationships between variables which do not seem to be captured in other studies available so far. This is a departure from existing works by other researchers and contributes in a way to existing knowledge on tourism distribution.

The current study, which is an exploratory one, stands out as the first of its kind to isolate tour operators in Ghana in such an investigation. Unlike this study, other similar studies in the country looked at travel intermediaries in general.

In terms of significance, the study has thrown more light on the tour packaging process. It involves the sorting and bundling of elements such as information, advice, negotiation, booking, payment and transfer of title at various points of the travel continuum.

The study could enable stakeholders in the tour operation trade to enrich their practices as they are guided by the findings. They could compare their activities to what prevails at other destinations as captured by the study.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

In line with the findings of the study a number of recommendations has been made for stakeholders and policy makers.

- All tour operators in the industry must register with the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) even if they register with other credible authorities such as the District Assemblies.
- Tour operation organisations in Ghana should spread their operations to the regional capitals instead of concentrating their practices in the nation's capital.
- Tour operators in the country must be encouraged by TOUGHA to obtain membership status in order to enjoy the benefits that go with such unions.
- Tour operators in Ghana must shift from the current predominant inbound operations to also expand their outbound operations so that Ghana can also be recognized as a generating country instead of the current status of recipient country of tourism.
- Policy makers must provide an enabling investment climate which will encourage investors to establish tour operation organisations in other parts of the country apart from the nation's capital.
- It is recommended that tour operators in the country could take advantage of the opportunities presented by the virtual channel and the trends in marketing and the industry to aggregate information and specialized knowledge in a single format at a single virtual destination.
- Tour operators will need to routinize transactions by providing a single integrated reservation system that allows customers to book all parts of their holiday in a single transaction.

- The tour operators could facilitate customization by offering the customer the ability to create his or her own itenary in whatever manner suits the customer.
- Tour operators will also have to permit comparison by offering information in a uniform layout, providing access to comments made by previous tourists, and operating a grading system.

Suggestions for Further Research

As an exploratory research, the study suggests the following areas for further research.

- The contribution of travel agents to tourism development in Ghana.
- Role of the state in travel intermediation practices in Ghana.
- Tour operators contribution towards tourists' safety in Ghana.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Format on likert scale

Role of respondent Tour Operators

Role factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agreed
i. Identify consumer needs, requests and expected experiences	1	2	3	4	5
ii. Assemble tourism products from different providers according to customer expectations	1	2	3	4	5
iii. Reduction of prices by negotiation and pre-purchasing tourism products in bulk.	1	2	3	4	5
iv. Issues and deliver travel documentation in ticking, vouchers etc.	1	2	3	4	5
v. Assessment of quality of facilities and products.	1	2	3	4	5
vii. Assistance in legal requirements for consumers (e.g. visas) and Suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
vii. Facilitate communications between consumers and suppliers especially in multilingual and multicultural environments	1	2	3	4	5
viii. Provision of information by using leaflets, maps, brochures, video, CDs.	1	2	3	4	5
ix. Consumers guidance advice/consultation	1	2	3	4	5
x. Undertake pre-and-post experience marketing research	1	2	3	4	5
xi. Facilitation of access to often remote tourism products, for both bookings and purchasing.	1	2	3	4	5
xii. Arranging details and ancillary services, such as insurance visa, currency, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

xiii Assume risk when pre-purchasing tourism products.	1	2	3	4	5
xiv. Promotion of particular products or packages, in co-package, in co- operation with suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
xv. Promotion of distressed capacity in low period and at the last minute	1	2	3	4	5
xvi. Compliant handling for both customers and industry	1	2	3	4	5
xvii. Tour planning and preparation	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX II

Format for likert scale

Reasons for locating Business in Ghana

Reasons statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agreed
i. I am a Ghanaian national	1	2	3	4	5
ii. Favourable investment climate	1	2	3	4	5
iii. Ghana is a popular tourist destination.	1	2	3	4	5
iv. I am in a joint ventureship with a Ghanaian national	1	2	3	4	5
v. Ghana is accessible to major international tourist markets.	1	2	3	4	5
vi. Ghana has calendar of special events	1	2	3	4	5
vii. The proverbial Ghanaian hospitality	1	2	3	4	5
viii. There is adequate information regarding tourism facilities, prices and services in Ghana.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX III

Results of factor analysis on role statements

	Factor Loading*						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Role Statements							
i. Identify consumer's needs, requests and expected experience	.313	-.012	.142	.042	.041	.-316	.748
ii. Assemble tourism products from different providers according to customers	-.232	-.150	.076	.175	-.047	.919	.783
iii. Reduction of prices by negotiation and pre-purchasing tourism products in bulk	.803	.222	.003	.014	.300	.144	.057
iv. Issue and deliver travel documentation, i.e. ticketing, vouchers, etc.	.761	-.082	.015	.236	-.097	.110	.030
v. Assessment of quality of facilities and products	-.013	.798	.243	.321	.-097	.162	.019
vi. Assistance in legal requirements for consumers (e.g. visas) and suppliers	.413	.193	.159	.024	.012	.804	.073
vii. Facilitate communications between consumers and suppliers especially in	.176	.369	.088	-.348	.208	.222	.495
viii. Provision of information by using leaflets, maps, brochures, video and CDs	.046	.175	.092	-.161	.841	.035	.036
ix. Consumers guidance advice/consultation	.188	.341	-.336	-.088	.506	.394	.028
x. Undertake pre-and-post experience marketing research	.072	.031	.129	.395	.696	-.022	.005
xi. Facilitation of access to often remote tourism products, for both booking and purchasing	.666	.611	-.190	.115	.052	.099	.107
xii. Arranging details and ancillary services, such as insurance visa currency, etc.	.690	.058	-.116	.043	.099	.603	-.111
xiii. Assume risk when pre-purchasing tourism products	-.234	.267	-.337	.538	.274	.372	-.017

xiv. Promotion of particular products or packages, in co-operation with suppliers	.134	.719	.145	.057	.322	.069	-.188
xv. Promotion of distressed capacity in low period and at the last minute	.210	.033	.025	.787	.078	.012	-.002
xvi. Compliant handling for both customers and industry	.200	.371	.052	.696	-.165	-.059	.224
xvii. tour planning and preparation	-.024	.022	.886	-.023	.269	.202	.069
xviii. Tour evaluation	-.059	.283	.837	.032	-.076	-.147	.161

Interpretation of factor loadings:

1. Facilitation of travel arrangements in areas of booking, visa acquisition, currency and purchasing of tourism products.
2. Assessment of quality of facilities and promotion of particular products or packages in co-operaton with suppliers.
3. Tour planning, preparation and education.
4. Assumption of risk when pre-purchasing, promotion of distressed capacity in low period at last minute and handling of complaints for both customers and industry.
5. Provision of information through leaflets, brochures, video and CDs to guide customers and conducting pre-and post experience marketing research.
6. Offering ancillary services such as insurance, visa, currency and legal assistance.
7. Identifying customers' needs, matching them with products and facilitating communications between consumers and suppliers with multi-lingual and multi- cultural environments.

APPENDIX IV

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

SURVEY ON ROLE OF TRAVEL INTERMEDIARIES IN GHANA:

THE CASE OF TOUR OPERATORS IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS.

This study is for a Ph.D Thesis being undertaken in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the University of Cape Coast. You have been selected as one of the respondents, and as such, your participation is valuable. Your anonymity is highly guaranteed as all responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you for your co-operation.

STRUCTURE OF QUESTIONNAIRE		
01	MODULE A	Profile of travel intermediary
02	MODULE B	The tour operator business in ghana
03	MODULE C	Role of tour operator intermediary in ghana
04	MODULE D	Locating business in ghana
05	MODULE E	Socio-demographic characteristics

MODULE A: PROFILE OF TRAVEL INTERMEDIARY

1. Which of the following best describes your business as a travel intermediary?
    a. Tour Operator [ ]
    b. Travel Agent [ ]
    c. Tour Guide [ ]
    d. Meeting Planner [ ]
    e. Broker [ ]
    f. Travel Consolidator [ ]

2. State the year when your business was established......................................
3. State the location of your business
    a. Town ....
    b. Region ....
    c. Address ....
4. What type of ownership is your business?
    a. Public Limited Liability Company [ ]
    b. Limited Liability Company [ ]
    c. Partnership [ ]
    d. Individual / Sole Proprietor [ ]
    e. Family Owned [ ]
5. State the number of employees in your outfit

    ....

6. Did you buy an existing enterprise for running your type of business?

    a. Yes [ ]   b. No [ ]

7. Is your formal education a pre-requisite for running your type of business?

    a. Yes [ ]   b. No [ ]

8. Is your business registered with the Ghana Tourist Board or District Assembly?

    a. Ghana Tourist Board [ ]
    b. District Assembly [ ]
    c. Both [ ]

9. In what capacity do you function as [ ]

    a. Consortium [ ]
    b. Part of a chain [ ]

10. Which category of tour operator will you identify your business with?

    a. In-bound Operator [ ]
    b. Out-Operator [ ]
    c. Both [ ]

MODULE B: THE TOUR OPERATOR BUSINESS IN GHANA

11. Which of the following are your key activities as a tour operator?

    a. Organising conferences / congresses [ ]
    b. Making special arrangements for business travellers [ ]
    c. Handling activity holiday / vacation groups [ ]
    d. Handling youth travel groups [ ]

e. Handling special interest groups, study groups and incentive travel groups [ ]

f. Providing guides, couriers and translators for individuals and / or groups; [ ]

g. Making special arrangements for individual travellers [ ]

12. Which of the following tourist products do you feature most in your promotion of tourist?

    a. Eco-tourism [ ]

    b. Adventure tourism [ ]

    c. Business tourism [ ]

    d. Leisure tourism [ ]

13. In what way do you market Ghana as a tourist destination?

    a. Issuing brochures [ ]

    b. Attending trade shows [ ]

    c. The website [ ]

    d. Trade journals [ ]

    e. Advertising in the media [ ]

14. Which of the following do you consider your leading markets?

Local businessmen [ ]

Foreign businessmen [ ]

Organised student groups [ ]

Local holiday makers [ ]

Foreign holiday makers [ ]

15. Give a rough estimate of the number of tourists your outfit encounters in its services each year on the average, both domestic and international

    ....

16. How many of these tourists are international visitors?

    ....

17. Which international markets do you feature prominently in your tour packaging to Ghana? Indicate in order of prominence

18. Name the most important attractions in Ghana for which you bring in tourist.

    ....

19. Which time of the year do you bring in most tourist?

    ....

20. How many tours do you operate annually?

    ....

21. On the average how many tours did you operate to Ghana in the last five years?

22. State the average number of tourists you brought into Ghana during the past five years?

    ....

23. When was the last time you promoted tourists to Ghana?

    a. The last three months [ ]
    b. The last six months [ ]
    c. The last nine months [ ]
    d. The last twelve months [ ]
    e. Others specify ....

24. Which festivals in Ghana do you include in your tour programmes?

....

25. Do you have any reason(s) for selecting those festivals?

a. Yes [ ]   b. No [ ]

If yes, what is/are your reasons? . ...

26. How often do you organise domestic tours in a year?...

27. When was the last time you organised a domestic tour?

....

28. State any contribution(s) if any, made by your firm towards the development of any tourism infrastructure in Ghana

....

29. Are you a member of the Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA) or any travel intermediary organisation in Ghana?

a. Yes [ ]   b. No [ ]

(i) If yes, state any significant contribution made by TOUGHA or the relevant organisation towards tourism promotion in Ghana

....

30. State any international travel intermediary organisation of which you are a member. ....

31. Indicate any travel intermediaries with which you have contractual agreement. ....

32. With which of the following do you have any relationship?

   a. Ghana Tourist Board (GTB) [ ]

   b. Ministry of Tourism & Diasporean Relations [ ]

c. Ghana tourist development company (GTDC) [ ]

d. Ghana Association of Travel and Tour Agencies (GHATTA) [ ]

e. Ghana tourism federation (GHATOF) [ ]

33. What benefit(s) do you obtain from the relevant organisation(s) in question 32 above? ....

34. Which of the following ancillary service provider(s) do you rely on in the discharge of your duties?

a. Couriers [ ]

b. Tour guides [ ]

c. Arimateur [ ]

d. Financial service providers [ ]

e. Incentive travel vouchers [ ]

f. Duty-free shopping centers [ ]

MODULE C: ROLE OF TOUR OPERATOR INTERMEDIARIES IN GHANA

35. Please indicate the role played by tour operators by choosing from a likert scale: 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree 3. Undecided 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree, the response that you choose for the role item on the left.

	Role	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
i.	Identify consumer's needs, requests and expected experiences	1	2	3	4	5
ii.	Assemble tourism products from different providers according to customer expectations	1	2	3	4	5
iii.	Reduction of prices by negotiation and pre-purchasing tourism products in bulk	1	2	3	4	5
iv.	Issue and deliver travel documentation, i.e ticketing, vouchers, e.tc	1	2	3	4	5
v.	Assessment of quality of facilities and products	1	2	3	4	5
vi.	Assistance in legal					

	requirements for consumers (e.g visas and suppliers)	1	2	3	4	5
vii.	Facilitate communications between consumers and suppliers especially in multilingual and multicultural environments	1	2	3	4	5
viii.	Provision of information by using leaflets, maps, brochures video, CDS	1	2	3	4	5
ix.	Consumers guidance advice/consultation	1	2	3	4	5
x.	Undertake pre-and post experience marketing research	1	2	3	4	5
xi.	Facilitation of access to often remote tourism products, for both bookings and purchasing	1	2	3	4	5
xii.	Arranging details and ancillary services, such as insurance visa, currency, e.t.c	1	2	3	4	5

xiii.	Assume risk when pre-purchasing tourism products	1	2	3	4	5
xiv.	Promotion of particular products or packages, in cooperation with suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
xv.	Promotion of distressed capacity in low period and at the last minute	1	2	3	4	5
xvi.	Complaint handling for both customers and industry	1	2	3	4	5
xvii.	Tour planning and preparation	1	2	3	4	5
xviii.	Tour evaluation	1	2	3	4	5

36. Does your company have any web site? a. Yes [ ] b. No [ ]

For how long has your web site been functioning?

a. Less than one year [ ]
b. Between one and two years [ ]
c. More than two years [ ]
d. Others, specify ....

37. Please indicate the three most important reasons for utilising a web site. Rank them from 1 to 3 with 1 as the most important

a. Marketing [ ]

b. To provide information about the different tourist destinations [ ]

c. Online reservations / sales [ ]

d. To collect customer information [ ]

e. To provide continuous service [ ]

f. To gain new customers [ ]

g. Other, specify ....

38. Will you agree to a suggestion that the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers some competition to your business?

a. Yes [ ] b. No [ ]

If yes, in what way? ....

39. Which of the following types of ICT are relevant to the operation of your business as a tour operator?

a. View Data [ ]

b. Computerised reservation systems (CRS) [ ]

c. Front and back office management systems [ ]

d. Other, specify ....

40. Will you say that your business is information intensive hence you adopt the ICT?

a. Yes [ ] b. No [ ]

41. Will you say that ICT enhances the actual quality of information in terms of reliability, accuracy and detail

a. Yes [ ] b. No [ ]

MODULE D LOCATING BUSINESS IN GHANA

42. Please indicate the reasons for which you have located your business in Ghanaby choosing from a likert scale: 1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3.Undecided   4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree the response that you choose for the role item on the left.

	Reasons	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
i.	I am a Ghanaian national	1	2	3	4	5
ii.	Favourable investment climate	1	2	3	4	5
iii.	Ghana is a popular tourist destination	1	2	3	4	5
iv.	I am in a joint ventureship with a Ghanaian national	1	2	3	4	5
v.	Ghana is accessible to major international tourist markets	1	2	3	4	5
vi.	Ghana has calendar of special events	1	2	3	4	5
vii.	The Ghanaian proverbial hospitality	1	2	3	4	5
viii.	There is adequate information regarding					

	tourism facilities, process and services in Ghana.	1	2	3	4	5

43. State precise the area in Ghana, where your business is located. Locate and give reason(s) for the location.

....

....

MODULE E. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

44. Sex a. Male [ ] b. Female [ ]

45. State the level of education attained

a. No formal education [ ]
b. Primary [ ]
c. Middle / JSS [ ]
d. Secondary / commercial / technical [ ]
e. University [ ]
f. Other tertiary [ ]
g. Post graduate [ ]
h. Other (please indicate)..

46. Marital status

a. Single (Never Married) [ ]
b. Divorce / Separate [ ]
c. Married [ ]
d. Widowed [ ]

47. Religion

Christian [ ]

Moslem [ ]

Other (please indicate) ....

48. Which category of income bracket is close to your annual household income?

Less than 5000.00

5000.00 – 9,999.00 [ ]

10,000.00 – 14,999.00 [ ]

15,000.00 – 19,999.00 [ ]

20,000.00 – 24,999.00 [ ]

25,000.00 – 29,999.00 [ ]

30,000.00 – 34,999.00 [ ]

35,000.00 and above [ ]

49. If you have any additional comments, please share them with us

....

....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your responses will be a valuable contribution towards tourism development in Ghana.

APPENDIX V

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TOUR OPERATORS ON: ROLE OF TRAVEL INTERMEDIARIES IN GHANA: A CASE OF TOUR OPERATORS IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS.

(i) Opening

A. Introduction:

I am Joseph Kwadjoe Abanga

B. Purpose:

I would like to interact with you by asking you to answer a few questions about your business.

C. Motivation:

Can I kindly have your permission to have the proceedings recorded to supplement the information in the questionnaire on the above topic?

D. Duration of interview:

The interview is not expected to last more than ten (10) minutes.

Please can you make some time for me now to respond to a few questions?

(ii) Opinions about your business:

Q 1.Which are the prominent Ghanaian festivals that you feature in your tour operation programmes?

Q 2. What is the rationale behind your patronage of such festivals in your tour operations?

Q 3. Mention some of the specific contributions made by the tour operators union of Ghana (TOUGHA) towards tourism promotion in Ghana.

Q 4. Do you have any relationship with the Ghana Association of travel and tours (GATTA)?

Q 5. What type of benefits do you obtain from your relationship with such organisation?

Q6. Do you have any relationship with some other relevant organisations within the tourism industry in Ghana?

Q 7.If yes, what are some of these organisations?

Q 8.What type of benefits do you obtain from your relationship with such organisations?

Q 9.Which specific airlines do you have collaborations with?

Q 10.What type of collaboration exists between your organisation and such airlines?

Thank You For YourTime!!!!