Pros and Cons of Hosting International Tourists: Is It Rational?

Elizabeth Agyeiwaah, Oheneba Akyeampong, Kwaku Adutwum Boakye & Addae Boateng Adu-Gyamfi

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ELIZABETH AGYEIWAAH*, OHENEBA AKYEAMPONG*,
KWAKU ADUTWUM BOAKYE* AND ADDAE BOATENG
ADU-GYAMFI**

*Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast,
Ghana and **Department of Population and Health, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

ABSTRACT *Homestay hosting is increasingly becoming popular in tourists destinations in different parts of the world. And it is, presently, being used as a tool for sustainable community development. Despite its seeming virtue and it often being positioned as an attractive alternative tourism product/ accommodation; academic work has not yet critiqued homestay tourism in the same manner. An empirical knowledge of the good and bad side of hosting is relevant to help devise measures to minimise or if possible eliminate such hosting problems. This article, thus, provides a critical and timely review of homestay tourism, using in-depth interviews with 12 host families in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana. The study found that homestay hosting is beneficial to host families as it offers social interaction and preservation of local culture, a sense of local pride, income and employment, and educational opportunities for operators' children. Notwithstanding the benefits, challenges exist including culture shock, seasonality of homestay business, insecurity and delayed payments by some intermediaries. In the end, the implications of understanding both the positive and negative aspects of hosting international tourists are discussed.*

Introduction

For more than a decade, increased attention has been given in tourism and hospitality research to the benefits of hosting tourists to tourism communities through various impact studies (Gu & Wong, 2006). This attention acknowledges the fact that, socially, hosting international tourists is one of the great ways to stay home and make friends from all around the world. On their part, McIntosh, Lynch, and Sweeney (2010, p. 514) contend that for most retired host families, tourism hosting becomes the "replacement" for previous social networks present in their previous careers. Hence, the literature identifies homestay hosting as beneficial in terms of promoting socio–cultural interactions/exchanges (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010; Kayat, 2010; Sweeney, 2008), providing supplementary income and employment (Liu, 2006; Sweeney, 2008), preserving local culture (Wang, 2007), providing authentic learning environment for hosts' children (Richardson, 2004) and empowering women in rural communities (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Osman et al., 2008). For example, Kayat (2010) in a qualitative study explored the nature of cultural

benefits contributed by Kampung Pelegong Homestay Programme located in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia to both host families and visitors. The author reported that hosting tourists was beneficial to host families as it increases social cohesion among the hosts and contributes to their commitment to preserve and to provide knowledge on local customs and daily routine to enhance tourist experience. However, the author shed little light on the specific challenges of hosting to host families. In addition to improving the quality of life of operators, homestay is a source of livelihood for operators. In their simple costing on homestay operations in Malaysia, Ibrahim and Razzaq (2010) stated that host families are paid RM 40 for hosting each guest per night. Moreover, hosting a guest cost roughly about RM 23 (3 meals, electricity and water), bringing to a marginal profit of RM 17 received by an operator per guest per night. This shows the commercial nature of such private homes making them business entities (Lynch, 2005).

In another insightful paper on homestay in Malaysia, Liu (2006, p. 885) affirmed that hosting international tourists provides not only an alternative choice for cheaper accommodation to the tourists, but also a supplementary source of income to the hosts. Reporting the views of 16 homestay operators through in-depth interviews, Liu (2006) found that regardless of the limited number of visitors, the income derived from the homestay operations appears to be relatively substantial as compared to the low monthly living costs needed for an ordinary village family. All the operators involved indicated an extremely high level of appreciation of the extra income received from the homestay programme. However, the author highlighted some grievances of operators with regard to the distribution of the tourist dollars. According to the homestay owners, only 40% of the total fees paid by the tourists are given to homestay operators with the remaining 60% left in the hands of the programme coordinators for administration and marketing purposes. Additionally, Acharya and Halpenny (2013) explored how the springing up of homestay businesses in rural Nepal has empowered women and enhanced gender equality. According to the authors, in many homestay facilities in Nepal, responsibilities in terms of accommodation arrangement, food provision, cultural performance and tour guiding activities at various sites are done by women. Moreover, women operate handicraft shops, souvenir stores and tea-houses in their communities. Another study on the theoretical purpose of homestay in strengthening mutual and cultural exchange between homestay students and hosts in Australia reveals how homestay hosting benefits hosts' children in terms of providing a learning environment (Richardson, 2004). For Wang (2007), hosting is one of the great ways of preserving local culture. Observing the operations of Naxi homestay facilities in China, the author reports how host families were motivated to preserve their heritage to attract visitors through hosting.

However, the costs of hosting have rarely been captured in previous literature, although various positive impacts of homestay hosting have recently gained momentum within scholarly discourse exploring the positive consequences of the homestay phenomenon. Significantly, homestay hosting can lead to culture difference/shock (Akbar, Bael, Hassan, & Baguley, 2002; Richardson, 2004), insecurity and unnecessary family interruption (Sweeney, 2008), staged authenticity (Wang, 2007), food complaints and language barrier (Akbar et al., 2002). A study by Richardson (2004) on international students studying in Australia indicated that host families face cross-cultural challenges (culture shock) as they engage in homestay hosting. Such challenges are as a result of cultural differences between both parties (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). The author reported some psychological symptoms of culture shock including irritability, distrust, depression, homesickness, helplessness, fear, anger and anxiety. Moreover, the differences in cultures between host and international guests have been reported in homestay studies in Australia (Akbar et al., 2002).

Moreover, a qualitative investigation of the relationship between host families and their commercial home and its influences on product construction by Sweeney (2008) found

insecurity as a major challenge of hosting. Additionally, Wang (2007) in her ethnographic study on homestay in Lijiang by dissecting the concept of authenticity through three inter-related concepts of object, self and home revealed how the term "authenticity" was custo-mised to meet the needs of homestay guests based on host modifications. However, the above studies are characterised with different guests and settings. More importantly, given the different cultural fabrics of previous study settings, it is prudent to explore the likely challenges and benefits of hosting international guests from an African context.

Bearing in mind that the tourism product is an experience good (Akyeampong, 2007) than has perhaps been acknowledged in previous research to date, and given the socially constructed nature of hospitality (Lashley, Lynch, & Morrison, 2007), it is suitable for the current study to seek to understand the hosts' perspective of homestay hosting from a different geographical region (Ghana). Consequently, the present article contributes a host's perspective of the outcomes of homestay hosting experience by reporting the views of 12 host families interviewed in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana. The present study is, therefore, a site-specific research geared towards broadening our understanding of hosting international tourists.

Conceptual Framework

Towards a Framework for the Irrational Host

For several decades, tourism and hospitality research have benefited from numerous frame-works explaining the inter linkages among tourism concepts. This study seeks to develop a framework (Figure 1) to help readers understand the theoretical insights of homestay hosting in Ghana. For classical theories like social exchange, social relations are based on evaluation of costs and benefits to actors. Significantly, the major goal in every
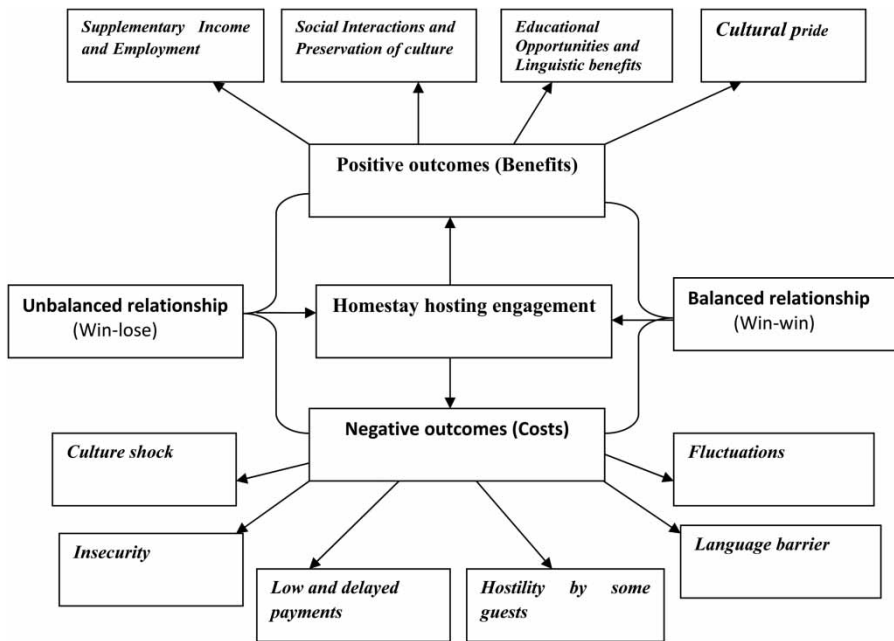

Figure 1. The "irrational" host.

tourism development is to seek a balance between costs and benefits for both residents and tourists. Consequently, a positive evaluation of tourism outcomes guarantees continuous engagement, whereas a negative evaluation reduces exchange behaviour or possible withdrawal (Aps, 1992).

Contrary to such earlier theories, a negative unbalanced exchange does not always lead to "no exchange". The framework for the present study explains how respondents continuously host international guests despite the numerous challenges they encounter. Figure 1 shows the two major outcomes of hosting international tourists. Homestay operators do evaluate the likely outcomes of their engagements before hosting. The relationship could be balanced when both guest and host families obtain equitable outcomes (win–win relationship). However, host families may gain more or lesser than the international tourists in an unbalanced outcome. Thus, there are instances, where the positive outcomes may be outnumbered by the negative outcomes, yet for some reasons, host families may still be willing to engage in hosting international tourists leading to irrationality in hosts' engagement. The present study shares similarities with that of Sweeney (2008) but differs in some respect. For instance, in her qualitative study in Scotland, the author reported that operators encountered security challenges which were also found in the present study. Additionally, Sweeney (2008) reported unnecessary family interruption as another constraint for homestay hosting, however, in Ghana and specifically the Kumasi Metropolis, the latter challenge was not enumerated by host. Studies by Richardson (2004) on homestay in Australia revealed culture shock as a major hurdle for host families hosting international students. An in-depth analysis of the concept of authenticity using homestay in Lijiang reveals that hosting tourists can lead to customised authenticity of hosts' culture; although this customised authenticity is embraced by tourists (Wang, 2007). It is worth mentioning that despite the various challenges identified in previous homestay studies, host families are glued to the business and weighed the benefits of hosting higher than the numerous costs.

Study Area

Endowed with a rich variety of natural and man-made resources, Ghana's Ashanti Region has emerged as the cultural heartbeat of the country's tourism industry. The region's high standing in the tourism sector is based on its large stock of tourism resources which range from cultural resources to historical heritage. Kumasi which is the official capital of the region has a population of 2,035,064 people according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The Kumasi Metropolis is located in the transitional forest zone which spreads from latitudes 6.35°N to 6.40°N and longitudes 1.30°W to 1.35°W and an elevation range between 250 and 300 metres above sea level with an area of about 254 square kilometres. The major sectors of the economy fall under trade/commerce/services, manufacturing/industry and primary production/agriculture. Economic activities in the metropolis are predominantly trade/commerce (service economy inclusive) with an employment level of 71%. This is followed by industry and agriculture with employment levels of 24% and 5%, respectively. Kumasi has, therefore, established itself as a major commercial centre. Commercial activity is centred on wholesaling and retailing. Both banking and non-banking financial institutions also offer ancillary services (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, 2006).

The metropolis is dominated by the "Asante" or "Ashanti" ethnic group who belong to the larger Akan group. Hence, the name Ashanti Region means the region of the Ashantis. The Asantes speak a local language known as "twi", however, almost all the other ethnic groups in Ghana are represented in the metropolis. Like the broader Akan culture, the Ashantis believe that the family and the mother's clan are most important. As a result, a

child is said to inherit the father's soul or spirit and from the mother a child receives flesh and blood making them more closely aligned to the mother's clan (Busia, 1951; Rattray, 1923). They believe that plants, animals, and trees have souls. They also believe in fairies, witches and forest monsters. There are a variety of religious beliefs involving ancestors, higher gods, or "abosom", and "Nyame", the Supreme Being of Ashanti. In addition to the above, the Ashantis also practice many ceremonies for marriage, death, puberty and birth. The line of inheritance or succession in the Akan culture is matrilineal. Each family unit is headed and controlled by the Abusuapanin and Obaapanin who always ensure that the family is in perpetual peace and harmony. Where there is a problem among members of the same family, the two elders of the family assisted by other members of the same family will resolve the conflict. This system operates in every family and it goes up to the larger community where there are chiefs, queen mothers and elders, who apart from being spiritual heads of the larger community, are responsible for the welfare and well-being of everybody (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, 2006).

According to Gyekye (1998), the Akans share an important traditional African belief that all humans are the same no matter their colour or race. Significantly, at the heart of the Akan Culture is the concept of hospitality. As a result, visitors are treated with much respect and care. For instance, the Akan word "Akwaaba" is usually expressed to welcome strangers and visitors after which they are offered seat, water and food. It is believed that ancestors and gods might come in various forms but mostly as strangers. Hence, caution is taken on how strangers are treated. In terms of attitude, the Akan culture stresses the importance of according respect to the elderly.

Explaining the ethical principles and philosophies underlying the distinctive moral values of the Akans, Wiredu and Gyekye (1992) summarised the Akan moral values in two main statements. One is the need to treat people equally (visitors/neighbours) and the second is to seek communal well-being. From the above principles emerge the concepts of hospitality, kindness and generosity. Thus, the concept of hospitality is deemed sacred and expected from all. Since the metropolis is dominated by an Akan group (Asantes), the Akan concept of hospitality is strictly upheld. Moreover, with about 78.8% of the residents belonging to Christianity, which equally preaches hospitality, residents treat strangers with utmost care perhaps for the purpose of reciprocity. For this reason, homestay hosting is one way of displaying the moral values of the Akans (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, 2006).

The metropolis is also known for its rich cultural attraction helping it gain the accolade "cultural hearth" of Ghana (Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), 2011). Some of its attractions include the Manhyia Palace which is the main seat of the Ashanti King. Another important attraction is the Kumasi Centre for National Culture popularly known by folks as "Cultural Centre". Established in 1952, its specific attractions include the craft centre, Prempeh II Museum, cultural displays and a gift shop. One cannot talk about popular attractions in Kumasi without mentioning the famous legend, Okomfo Anokye whose remarkable contribution to the Ashanti Kingdom is applauded and well documented in Ashanti history. His irremovable sword site is designated one of the famous attractions in the metropolis. Moreover, the popular Asante festival "Adae Kese" draws a large number of both domestic and international tourists to the metropolis (Briggs, 2007; GTA, 2011).

Popularly known to be one of the bustling cities in the country, its central market attracts large numbers of tourists every day. The War Museum in the Fort St George has a large collection of historical and cultural artefacts. Other attractions in the metropolis worth mentioning are the zoological gardens, kente weaving at Bonwire, Ahwia crafts, shrines at Ejisu Bisease, just to mention but a few (Briggs, 2007; GTA, 2011). Since homestay relies on authentic local culture (Wang, 2007), the metropolis was the appropriate study site.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Homestay Arrangement in the Metropolis

Lowe (1988) has emphasised the relevance of networking in aiding business survival. Lynch (2000) followed up by analysing the linkages between networking behaviour and financial turnover in tourism and hospitality businesses like homestay. The significant role of such networks is evident in homestay arrangements in Ghana. In Ghana, two prominent intermediaries who liaise with homestay operators could be found. First is the GTA and second is NGO intermediary. The recent increase in study abroad and volunteer programmes has led to a recent trend in accommodation arrangement, whereby intermediaries as part of such packages arrange for homestay accommodation for their guests. Consequently, homestay establishments are categorised into two main groups. That is, those officially registered by the GTA and those operating with NGOs. The difference between the two intermediaries is that licensed homes in addition to the official recognition and publicity are also responsible for ensuring that their homes are patronised by both domestic and international tourists. However, homes registered under NGOs do not go through such stress as they rely on the NGOs for international guests. Since the NGOs organise an all-year round volunteer and study abroad programmes, homestay operators are always assigned some numbers of tourists every year through such networks. The metropolis has five licensed homestay facilities with the GTA and over 50 unlicensed homestay facilities operating independently by NGOs. The NGOs include Projects Abroad, School for international Training, Student Youth Travel Organisation and Light for Children.

Study Methods

The research approach used in this study shares similarities with previous research by McIntosh and Siggs (2005) and McIntosh et al. (2010) that followed an interpretive approach to the understanding of the homestay phenomenon. The interpretive approach is generally associated with qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). Sarantakos (2005) observes that researchers who take this position believe that reality is socially constructed. Moreover, the interpretative approach allows researchers to get close to participants to interpret their subjective understanding of reality and appeals to the author as a way of obtaining in-depth understanding. The study adopted a qualitative approach since the study wanted the unique lived experiences of homestay operators.

The study targeted homestay operators in the Kumasi Metropolis. In all, over 50 homestay facilities were shortlisted for the study. Homestay owners were initially contacted personally through telephone calls and personal visitation. Finally, 12 host families fully gave their consent to participate in the study and were hence sampled purposely. The data collection took place between the months of June and August 2012 after scheduling convenient periods with host families through telephone calls.

The study used an interview guide as the main data collection tool. The design of the research instruments followed previous works by Liu (2006) and McIntosh and Siggs (2005). The interview guide had three main broad themes. The first section sought to profile host families in the metropolis. Sub-topic included questions on the host demographics, number of rooms, location, year of commencement, registration status and whether they were full-time or part-time operators. The next section explored the benefits of hosting. The final section examined the costs of hosting from operators' perspectives. Each interview with homestay owners lasted for approximately 1 hour 15 minutes. Moreover, the researcher took extra time inspecting the facilities.

For most couples operating homestay, it was necessary to engage both parties. However, an instance where one was unavailable, the other party (male or female) was interviewed. That is, the schedules of host families were such that getting both couples was difficult. However, there were two couple interviews and the remaining ten host families were purposely interviewed during the data collection.

Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks were used to analyse emerging themes from the interview responses since this technique helps to "unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). The tool has its roots from works by Toulmin (1958), Corbin and Strauss (1990), Ritchie and Spencer (1994) and Miles and Huberman (1994). The tool begins from a basic theme towards a global theme. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic networks are one of the simple but useful ways of analysing qualitative data. The purpose of thematic networks is to help systematise the extraction of: (i) lowest order premises evident in the text (basic themes); (ii) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarise more abstract principles (organizing themes) and (iii) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (global themes) (p. 388). The above themes are subsequently represented in as web-like maps in qualitative analysis. Hence, basic themes emanating from the coded data collected from homestay owners were grouped into the underlying stories they are telling (basic themes) and these were further summarised into organising themes. The organising themes were grouped finally into a concluding theme which is the global theme. For instance, some basic themes emerged from interview responses including "homestay hosting supplements the family's income" and "hosting is a source of employment to the family". These were the basic stories from the interviews and are the lowest order premises evident in the text. Hence, themes like "income and employment" constitute the organising theme and can be grouped under the broad (global) theme "benefits of hosting international tourists". The thematic network ensured that the researcher reported independently what actually emerged out of the interviews without any interference.

Results

Profile of Host Families Interviewed

In terms of profile, all homestay facilities were managed by owners and were owner operated. Close to 60% of the facilities were owners' properties. Homestay owners who participated in the study were mostly aged 30 years and above. About 80% of the respondents had children living in their homes. Of the 12 respondents interviewed, only one homestay owner was into the business full time. The remaining 11 homestay owners were part-time operators (Table 1). The average number of rooms was three with an average price of 20 Ghana Cedis ($10) per night. More than half of the respondents were males, whereas majority had attained a higher level of education (Table 1). Moreover, a cultural dimension that characterises homestay operation is the domestic role of women in Ghana. In almost all couple homes, women/ wives were in charge of servicing guests with support from their husbands. This is because customarily, it is the role of women to handle house chores including hosting guests of all kinds. This supports Lynch's (2000) finding that most hosts are assumed to be females which shows the organisational biases of homestay operations. Lynch (2000, p. 104) continues that there is evidence of conjugal task allocation present.

Benefits of Hosting

Host families enjoyed a number of benefits through homestay hosting. Interview responses from respondents confirmed this. Based on the thematic network that guided data analysis

Table 1. Summary of private homes interviewed

Facility owner	Sex	Age (years)	Level of education	Occupation	Full/part time (F/P)	Number of rooms	Year of establishment	Registration with the GTA
K1	Male	55	Tertiary	Social Worker	P	2	2005	Unregistered
K2	Female	52	No formal education		F	5	2007	Unregistered
K3	Female	59	Secondary	Food Vendor	P	2	2002	Unregistered
K4	Male	43	Basic	Mason	P	3	2008	Registered
K5	Female	39	Tertiary	Educational Administrator	P	2	1998	Unregistered
K6	Male	71	Tertiary	Retired Teacher	P	3	2006	Registered
K7	Male	48	Tertiary	Research Scientists	P	1	2005	Unregistered
K8	Female	42	Tertiary	Agricultural Extension Officer	P	1	2005	Unregistered
K9	Male	52	Tertiary	Agricultural Officer	P	2	2006	Unregistered
K10	Female	37	Tertiary	Dispenser	P	3	2007	Unregistered
K11	Male	35	Primary	Driver	P	5	2010	Registered
K12	Male	40	Secondary	Businessman	P	4	2008	Registered

and presentation, the outcomes of the interviews are discussed here under emerging specific sub-themes (organising themes) according to Attride-Stirling (2001).

Supplementary Income and Employment

Sweeney (2008) has enumerated several benefits of hosting to homestay operators. The author stated income as one of such benefits. Similar to the present study, income was identified together with employment opportunities. Thus, based on the proposed framework that underpinned the study most host families stated that hosting brings supplementary income to their families. According to host families, it also provides a source of employment for them. Host families reported:

> Hosting provides a source of income and employment for my family. I knew I will go on pension someday so I needed to plan towards it. In fact, I needed something to supplement my pension pay. With some of my children abroad, I decided to give the spare rooms out. (a 71-year-old Retired Teacher)

> As a food vendor with spare rooms, hosting supplements my family's income. Although the house is for my elder sister, I am in charge of it. We have spare rooms upstairs but renting out to locals was problematic, so I decided to host international guests who will not stay permanently. (a 59-year-old Food Vendor)

As Liu (2006) found in his study on homestay in Malaysia, regardless of the limited number of visitors, the income derived from homestay operations appears to be relatively substantial as compared to the low monthly living costs needed for an ordinary village family. All the operators involved indicated an extremely high level of appreciation of the extra income received from the homestay programme. According to host families in the present study, the perishability nature that characterises most hospitality services demands that spare rooms are rented to maintain their facilities.

Social Interactions and Preservation of Culture

Hosting tourists to enhance and preserve culture has been emphasised in the literature by Kayat (2010), Sweeney (2008) and Acharya and Halpenny (2013). According to operators in the present study, homestay is part of family life. Though, accommodating guests is a way of introducing strangers into the family, host families treated guests with great care as a result of the sacred concept of hospitality. As explained earlier by Wiredu and Gyekye (1992), hospitality is a sacred moral value and is preached culturally by the Akans at all levels. The Akans believe that ancestors and gods visit in all manners to evoke blessings and curses making it crucial for indigenes to be hospitable. The study revealed key socio-cultural benefits of hosting. Accordingly, a majority of the host families confirmed the socio-cultural benefits of homestay operations. Hospitality has been the hallmark of Ghanaians and the mere fact of hosting international guests was self-fulfilling, carries prestige, status and luck. Host families stated:

> Living with "Abrofo" (international guests) is the best thing that ever happened to the family. Their social interaction has been an insightful moments. We have also acquainted ourselves with international cultures though we have not travelled outside before. Besides, the children learn a lot from them. (a 39-year-old Educational Administrator)

According to host families, they take this opportunity to learn foreign delicacies by asking guests to teach them. Intercultural exchanges occur during this gastronomic adventure. According to host families, such exchanges inspire the need to preserve their authentic

local culture similar to a study by Kayat (2010) in Malaysia. One host family reported his experience:

> As part of our interaction, we give them the opportunity to prepare some of their delicacies which we all eat. Although it might not taste well sometimes, it is worth it. All these intercultural exchanges help preserve our culture. (a 40-year-old Businessman)

Cultural Pride

Homestay hosting gives local residents the opportunity to display their unique culture to tourists (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). According to Christian host families in the present study, Sundays are special days. They take the chance to expose the guests to Ghanaian religious life since they share similar religious affiliation. These were the words of one host family:

> Majority of our guests are Christians and on Sundays, we all go to church together. Their presence in the church is a sign of respect and dignity for the family and this makes us proud. On such occasions, we give them our traditional clothes which they enjoy wearing. Sometimes, they even wear to work. (a 37-year-old female Dispenser)

According to host families, guests make them proud of their delicacies when they willingly share meals with them. One host family recalled one instance:

> I was very surprised by one of our guests. Apparently, the first time she arrived, she insisted on eating the "banku" I had prepared even though it was late. I was scared she might have stomach upset but she insisted nothing will happen to her so I allowed her to eat. Every morning, she would accompany me to the stall where I sell food. She would rather eat there than take her breakfast in the house. (a 59-year-old Food Vendor)

The results of the present study confirm the socio-cultural benefits of homestay operations. Consequently, the benefits of hosting international tourists transcend the monetary value to lasting socio-cultural exchanges (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010). Moreover, hosting foreign guests gives the family respect by neighbours in the community. It also gives the impression that host families are among the hospitable in the community due to the Akan philosophy of hospitality. This confirms Kayat's (2010) study on homestay in Malaysia.

Educational Opportunities and Linguistic Benefits

The core concept of homestay is to provide a "home away from home" (McIntosh et al., 2010). Hence, international guests are treated as members of the family and not as total strangers (Gu & Wong, 2006). When that happens responsibilities are shifted to the guest when he/she assumes the role of a member of the family. For that reason, they readily offer any help when necessary. That is, a kind of reciprocity. In the present study, host families affirmed that in addition to the above benefits in homestay hosting, their children get the opportunity to study abroad. One host family reported:

> In addition to the economic benefits, hosting international tourists gives the children opportunity to get their education sponsored by international guests. Thus, international guests sometimes give the children invitation outside. The very fortunate ones normally have their education sponsored there. (a 35-year-old Driver)

According to host families, hosting makes their children multilingual as the kids interact with tourists from different cultural backgrounds since guests spend an average of 36 nights. This was the comment by one host family:

> Being in this business has given the children the chance to learn different languages. They are now more eloquent than they used to be. The guests teach and help them with their home work especially those who are students and teachers. (a 42-year-old female Agricultural Extension Officer)

Indeed, the educational value of hosting international tourists cannot be overemphasised. According to Kayat (2010), homestay provides a platform for both the host and guest to learn new cultures. During such interactions, new skills are acquired which are always useful to both parties.

Costs of Hosting—Challenges from International Tourists

Culture Shock

In a homestay setting, both host and guest are likely to enter the homestay situation with different ideas of roles within the family and it is inevitable that the parties involved in homestay will experience varying degrees of cultural adjustment, as the homestay situation goes beyond everyday interactions (Akbar et al., 2002, p. 7). Culture shock is one of the challenges that both host and guests are likely to encounter when brought under one roof. According to Rogers and Steinfatt (1999, p. 4), culture shock is "experienced by an individual who encounters a different culture". This arises as a result of the inability of the individual to adjust to the new culture. About three quarters of the host families experienced culture shock but in varied forms. Host families expressed their feelings on this matter:

> There is a huge difference between the Ghanaian culture and that of international guests/tourists. Tourists come with their own cultural baggage very different from ours. Though the adults are less troublesome, they constitute the minority of our guests, the majority are adolescents who can sometimes be very irritating. For instance, in the morning they see you seated here in the living room and they will not bother to say "hi" or "hello" and when you complain the response is "I choose to say hi or not". But in our culture greeting each other especially, the elderly is a valued practice. (a 39-year-old female Educational Administrator)

Another host narrated his experiences but from a different perspective:

> For me, they have this fascinating character. Some of them can be very lazy and will not bother to clean their rooms or flush the toilet after usage. You will have to do these basic chores for them. (a 48-year-old male Research Scientist)

Host families detested the smoking habits of international guests. One host family lamented:

> I get annoyed by their smoking habits. I have told them that smoking in the living room is prohibited; it is only allowed in the balcony when there is no one at home. I am scared of the health implications. (a Social Worker aged 55 years)

According to host families, although gossiping is popularly among Ghanaians, they did not imagine it was so common in Europe and America. According to them, they were startled to hear international guests gossip. Though, they described it as a learning experience:

> International guests really gossip a lot about their host families. They compare services in other homes and then insist you provide them similar ones. There is also this perception about "spicy foods". I thought spicy food meant excessive use of garlic, curry, nut meg and the rest, but to the guests it meant extra pepper. I must confess it's a challenging experience, though very enlightening. (a female Educational Administrator aged 39 years)

Cultural differences emanating from interactions between students and service providers are among the likely challenges of homestay hosting. According to host families, they

were a learning experience rather than an outright shocker. One host family overcame these shocks easily because of his international exposure:

> I was not surprised about their character having lived outside for a while; I have experienced several international cultures so it was easier to live with them. My international exposure has cushioned me against such "shocks." (a 71-year-old Retired Teacher)

In a similar homestay study which sought to evaluate the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Homestay Programme in Australia, Akbar et al. (2002) reported that not all providers experienced cross-cultural difficulties in their homes. Moreover, challenges with cultural do's and taboos including home etiquette, politeness and honesty were reported. Similarly to the present study, host families encountered cross-cultural challenges and expressed symptoms (irritation) of culture clash.

Insecurity

According to some host families, they were not safe in their own homes as they operate this business, although they enjoyed the business:

> We live in a secluded place but fortunately, people are now building close to us. To make our guests enjoy their privacy at night, we have given them a spare key to enable them have unimpeded access to the house anytime of the day. However, they sometimes forget to lock the door and I get worried we might be attacked by thieves one day. Nevertheless, we enjoy the business. (a 52-year-old male Agricultural Officer)]

Insecurity is perceived differently by the host families. As one of them puts it:

> As a parent, I get worried that something terrible might happen to them when they stay outside for long, especially at night. Due to this, I discussed with my husband they either go out with me or a matured family member. Because of them, I have to go out at night just to be sure they are safe. (a female Educational Administrator aged 39 years)

However, some host family said insecurity was not a problem at the time of the research and did not anticipate any mishap in the near future. She stated that:

> Security has never been a problem at all. My husband and I always give them orientation on the rules guiding life in the home. We then hand over spare keys to them. The main door is always locked and we have never experienced any theft case ever since we started this business some four years ago.
> (a 37-year-old female Dispenser)

The challenges of insecurity have been reported by Sweeney (2008) in Scotland. However, according to the author differences existed with regards to location of the facility. That is, whereas host families that live in primary and secondary regions were concerned about safety issues those in tertiary regions were unconcerned.

Hostility by Some Guests

Hospitality is a major attribute of Ghanaians in international circles and host families become worried when guests are hostile towards them because they are not sure about how to react. This was the main challenge of one of the host families. They recalled one uncomfortable experience:

> Our worst experience occurred when a guest came one early morning in August, 2009 and left the same day. She was not prepared to tell us what the problem was. All she said was "I want to go back home". It was very disheartening that day as the family thought something was wrong with us but could not figure it out. It hurts sometimes when clients call back home to tell their

> parents or the intermediary about their problems without giving us a clue. Some of them are very unfriendly; they will not talk to you and will spend the whole day in their rooms. However, some change with time. (a 52-year-old male Agricultural Officer)

This weird behaviour of some guests was also reported in previous homestay studies. This was not only between the host and guest but also among the guests themselves. In the present study, host families shared different views on the issue:

> My clients are willing to discuss their problems with the family. Some even call us when they return home. We also get the opportunity to talk to other members of their families. For previous guests, we hook up on Facebook and in fact some have decided to come back. (a female Educational Administrator aged 39 years)

Language Barrier

The important role of communication in the homestay experience has been echoed by Akbar et al. (2002). However, in their study in Australia, the authors reported that the major challenge for providers was communication difficulties due to language barriers. Communication challenge was also found in the present study. This was the report by one host family:

> With my children at home, communication is not a serious problem. Even for those speaking French the children help with the interpretations. However, some of the guests who speak Dutch find it difficult speaking English and this makes communication difficult. Nevertheless, sometimes their roommates help us with that. The intermediaries do the pairing with language differences in mind so the roommates become helpful in such cases. (a female operator aged 52 years)

However, one of the host families reported that she did not encounter any challenge with respect to language:

> So far, I have been receiving guests from English speaking countries and, being a teacher, communication with them has never been a problem. (a 39-year-old educational administrator)

Fluctuations

For some host families, the seasonal fluctuation of the homestay business is a major challenge to them. One host family stated:

> Though I am into this business on part-time basis, it constitutes an important source of income to the family. However, guests do not use the facilities throughout the year and this affects revenue. (a 43-year-old male mason)

The seasonal ebbs and flows in the homestay business were highlighted by Gu and Wong (2006) in a study in China.

Costs of Hosting: Challenges from the NGO Intermediaries

The relevance of networking in homestay operations has been emphasised by Lynch (2000). The author states that it is one of the means of encouraging business success. In the present study such networks with NGO intermediary were found. The NGO in this study provide operators with international guests. However, although homestay coordinators play the role of ensuring a successful experience between guests and host families (Liu, 2006); as liaisons of the homestay programme, they also pose challenges to the host

families. The obstacles vary from one intermediary to the other. Whereas some host families were satisfied with their homestay coordinators, others were not. The following problems were raised by host families.

Low and Delayed Payments

Profit maximisation has often been the raison d'être for private business; host families rely on the supplementary income from homestay to run other family activities. As a result, delays in payment affect the success of their operations. This was the major problem faced by host families, one of whom shared her experience as follows:

> Sometimes, the intermediaries delay in the payment of services rendered and that makes the work difficult. Sometimes they pay the money after services have been rendered, arguing that clients could leave in the course of the period and so paying before the service could be risky. (a 59-year-old female food vendor)

However, some host families did not encounter delays in payment for services rendered. They mentioned that there are intermediaries in the market who give them a good deal. This was the statement by one host family:

> I have not encountered any problem yet with my intermediaries. They make payment as soon as guests arrive. They also pay very well. (a 39-year-old female educational administrator)

The negative impressions host families have about intermediaries is consistent with studies conducted in Malaysia by Liu (2006).

Discussion

The four main benefits and six main costs of hosting international tourists suggest that hosting is a double edge-sword which can preserve culture and at the same time degrade culture if care is not taken (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Thus, host can involuntarily adopt guest lifestyles as they mingle and exhibit their diverse cultures. On a positive note, hosting international tourists enhances socio-cultural exchanges between host and guest (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010; Kayat, 2010; Sweeney, 2008). Consequently, hosting helps operators to learn new cultures and sell theirs to the outside world which promotes culture preservation (Wang, 2007). Since homestay owners are not the only stakeholders in the family, their children also benefit significantly from homestay operations. Accordingly, hosting international guest provides authentic learning environment for hosts' children (Richardson, 2004). For Acharya and Halpenny (2013), in most rural communities where women are relegated, homestay hosting is one of the significant ways of empowering them and ensuring gender equality.

However, operators are not free from the major costs of hosting. Operators encounter numerous challenges. For instance, the wider difference between host and guest cultures makes hosting a difficult venture. Moreover, language barrier between both parties can be quite frustrating for both the guest and the provider as neither completely understands what is expected (Akbar et al., 2002). Furthermore, operators encounter security challenges as they host international guests (Sweeney, 2008).

A key revelation of the above study is the continuous engagement of host families despite the numerous enumerated costs. The rationality of residents' engagement in tourism ventures has been dealt with in previous studies which affirm that residents weigh costs and benefits before engaging in any exchange (Ap, 1992). Most of the conclusions of such previous studies acknowledge the fact that residents are rational and continue to engage in

tourism activities that bring balanced outcomes or unbalanced when the benefits for host communities outweigh the costs. However, the proposed framework reveals that an unbalanced outcome (negative outcomes outnumber the positive outcomes) can lead to continuous engagement in tourism. Thus, host families are not always weighing outcomes theoretically as initially proposed but practically continue to host international tourists despite the numerous costs that come with it. This brings to mind the catalyst of hosting in the metropolis-kindness towards strangers. Residents are glued to hosting because of their cultural values such that the costs do not matter despite how numerous and irritating they may be. Residents look up to a higher benefit which is the need to be good to strangers (hospitality). With Christianity as a major religion which equally preaches hospitality, residents accord visitors with much respect and ignore the challenges. In the case of Sweeney (2008), residents reported numerous costs of hosting. However, none of the respondents opted and/or was ready to opt out of the business. Similarly to that of Wang (2007), although there had been series of customised authenticity in various homes to meet the needs of tourists which was gradually eroding the actual Naxi lifestyles, host families were not prepared to shut down but were ready to modify their houses to benefit from tourist dollars. The findings imply that a negatively unbalanced relation in exchange does not guarantee "no engagement". Residents assess benefits based on their own subjective standards and, hence, might still engage in exchange relations despite numerous costs.

Conclusion

This article has reported the benefits and costs of hosting international tourists in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana. The article has provided a pioneering insight into the key merits and demerits of hosting. Attention to both outcomes hosting is essential for determining the worth of hosting as well as guiding prospective host families in surrounding communities in their quest to participate in homestay operations. From host families' perspective, hosting provides numerous benefits ranging from economic to socio-cultural (Kayat, 2010). That is, through hosting host families get the chance to interact and earn extra income from international tourists.

As advocated in previous studies of homestay accommodation, a qualitative approach was adopted and in-depth interviews conducted with 12 host families in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana. Four key benefits emerged from hosting international tourists, including social interaction and preservation of local culture, a sense of local pride, income and employment, and educational opportunities for operators' children. These were rated higher than the costs—culture shock, seasonality of homestay business, insecurity and delayed payments by some intermediaries.

In line with the proposed framework, operators' motivation to participate in tourism development is as a result of the expected economic, social and psychological benefits it brings to host communities (Homans, 1961). However, a continuous engagement can still exist when outcomes are negatively unbalanced. The present study has proved that despite the numerous costs, host families considered it as a learning experience other than a serious challenge. Hence, they focused on satisfying their clients as homestay hosting gives them something more important than the challenges.

The findings of this study have also revealed the indispensable role of coordinators/ intermediaries in homestay arrangements (Lynch, 2000). For Akyeampong (2007), homestay intermediaries play the role of "honest brokers" through their coordination of the programme. Despite their coordinating role, more often than not, they create problems for the host and the guest as well. For this reason, their inability to make payments to host families on time renders the homestay operation unattractive for prospective host families.

In the case of Liu (2006), coordinators sometimes limit the distribution of the tourism dollar for hosts. Other host families also feel they are bias in the distribution of guests to host families in Malaysia. However, in the case of Kumasi Metropolis, not all host families encounter such challenges from the coordinators.

This study has examined the two main outcomes of hosting international tourists. A framework was proposed to explain the irrationality of host engagement. Thus, homestay operators continually engage in the business despite the enumerated challenges. The more attentive tourism researchers empirically outline the benefits and costs of hosting, the more likely they are to devise measures to minimise or if possible eliminate such problems. Moreover, in-depth knowledge of the immediate challenges and benefits is a stepping stone to improving host–guest relationship in the homestay business.

Limitation (s)

The findings of this study are from 12 host families and relate to a limited sample of homestay operators in the Kumasi Metropolis. Hence, any attempt to generalise the results should be done with caution. However, the findings generate many relevant conceptual issues in homestay hosting.

Acknowledgements

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