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FESTIVALS AS PRODUCTS
A framework for analysing traditional festivals in Ghana

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Introduction
In Ghana, traditional festivals (TFs) account for the largest flow of domestic tourists (Akyeampong 2007; Amenumey & Amuquandoh 2008; Ministry of Tourism/Ghana Tourist Board 1996). Some slave forts and castles in the country, including three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and a couple of national parks are highly popular on the international tourism circuit (Akyeampong 2011). However, largely because they are celebrated all over the country, TFs constitute the leading tourist attractions in the country.

Contemporary events, e.g. Farmers Day and Teachers Day, are the second major category of the country’s events tourism market. However, these are organised by the state, with the location being rotated among the ten administrative regions, annually. Beauty pageants, e.g. Miss Ghana, Miss Malaika, also belong to this category except that they are organised by private event management companies; they are typically urban-based and patronised mostly by the middle class. The Pan-African Festival of Arts and Culture (PANAFEST), which seeks to celebrate African history and cultural achievements as well as the ideals of Pan-Africanism, is a nontraditional festival instituted in 1992, initially as a biennial event but now held quadrennially (Amenumey & Amuquandoh 2008; GoG/UNDP 2010; Mensah & Dei-Mensah 2013; MoT/GTB 1996). PANAFEST used to attract both continental as well as diasporan Africans.

Largely on account of their wide geographical spread, diversity and the opportunity they create for family gathering, TFs generate the largest volumes of domestic tourists, with a wide array of consequences for their respective communities. Thus, as major domestic tourism resources, TFs, among others, contribute immensely to the preservation and/or revival of ancient traditions (Mathieson & Wall 1982) and to redistribution of incomes (Archer 1978; Sharpley & Telfer 2002). The increasing significance of TFs as tourism resources in Ghana is manifested in a number of areas. First is the revival of dormant festivals and establishment of new ones. Examples of TFs instituted since the mid-1980s – when tourism was declared a ‘priority sector’ in the country by PNDC Law 116 (1986) – are Akwantu-kesse (literally, the ‘great trek’) celebrated by the people of New Juabeng; Koforidua in the Eastern Region (Figure 35.1); Akwantu-tenen (i.e. the ‘long trek’), celebrated by the people of Akan-Buem; Nkwanta in the northern part of Volta Region; and Kente festival (kente is a uniquely
Figure 35.1  Map of Ghana showing major traditional festival towns
Ghanaian hand-woven fabric), celebrated by the people of Agortime-Kpetoe, Volta Region as the home of the expensive fabric which in times past was an exclusively royal garb.

Next is the event management industry, spawned by the expanding number of festivals. In recent times, the country has witnessed a boom in event management companies as well as tertiary-level academic programmes in events management. On its part, the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA, until 2011 it was Ghana Tourist Board), the national tourism organisation, has thrown in its weight by highlighting TFs in its promotional activities. As at 2012, the GTA published a calendar of some 85 TFs in its brochures (Mensah & Dei-Mensah 2013).

Finally, a major off-shoot of the growing interest in TFs has been the large volume of scholarly works into festivals in Ghana. These include Akyeampong and Yankholmes (2016), Amenumey and Amuquandoh (2008), Ewusi (2005), Amenumey (2003), Odotei (2002), Clarke-Ekong (1995, 1997), and Wyllie (1994). It is this interest by academia that prompted this chapter.

From a tourism development perspective, the foregoing works lack a theme or collection of themes that allows for a comparative analysis of two or more TFs. Besides their historical origins, there is hardly any other common sub-theme(s) that facilitate comparative studies. The conceptual basis and formats are as diverse as the origins and types of the TFs studied.

The eclectic approaches to research into TFs can be attributed to the significant differences in key parameters such as scale, location, cultural practices, level of popularity and impact in addition to historical origins. These conceptual and empirical issues are compounded by unspoken motives underlying the celebration of modern-day TFs in Ghana. A festival may be celebrated ostensibly to commemorate a historic landmark or thank the gods and ancestors for protection, guidance or good harvest. But at the end of it all, organisers hope to raise enough funds at least to cover expenses incurred, hence the inclusion of such aspects as launching, promotional activities and proposal for sponsorship in the modern-day TF.

In this chapter, it is argued that a common theme in which all stakeholders, from host communities and organisers to service providers, attendees and sponsors, can find a niche is the product approach. By definition, a product yields satisfaction to customers while generating incomes to designers, manufacturers and sellers. Hence, all stakeholders should easily relate to ‘the festival-as-product’ framework in ways that can be systematically appraised.

**Conceptual issues, definitions and proposed framework**

According to Middleton (1989, p. 373), ‘the concept of the “tourist product” is central to understanding the meaning and practice of management in all sectors of the travel and tourism industry’. Middleton then goes on to cite Kotler’s (1984) definition of a ‘product’, which is reproduced verbatim here because it is considered an appropriate starting point as well as a useful conceptual basis for this chapter. A product, in the view of Kotler (1984, p. 463), is ‘anything that can be offered to the market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy want or need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organisations and ideas’.

Therefore, a TF is a ‘product’; it attracts people’s attention; people travel from far and near to witness, participate or simply ‘consume’ a TF. A TF satisfies the psychological and social needs of residents and attendees. For host communities, organisers, crew and performers, the economic benefits derived cannot be overemphasised. Corporate organisations are not charities; they consider the gains to be made before sponsoring a TF. To all intents and purposes, therefore, TFs are products in their own right and constitute a vital component of the ‘total tourist product’ in which people undertake package or inclusive tours.
Festivals as products

A festival is a special event which after years of continuous celebration has become identified with a given locality or people (Allen, O’Toole, McDonnell & Harris 2011, p. 28). For the South Australian Tourism Commission (1997), a festival is a celebration of something the local community wishes to share and which involves the public as participants in the experience. For our purposes, a TF combines elements in the two definitions and goes further to stress the role of traditional leadership as the initiators and chief celebrants. A TF in Ghana is often identified with a traditional area (TA), which can be described as a group of communities with a common traditional leadership through whom all other traditional officers obtain authority, having a common ancestry, cultural practices and dialect. For our purposes, an arbitrary distinction is made between ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ TFs; the former is one celebrated from time immemorial, e.g. Apor, while the latter is one instituted since the mid-1980s, e.g. Adekyem. Finally, TFs have their exoteric components, marked by rituals often not for public consumption, but TFs also have their public segment. It is the latter that makes the festival a tourism resource. The ancient celebrations take centre stage, but increasingly, secondary activities such as fun-games, health walks and beauty pageants are added in a bid to extend the festival period. Leading TFs in the country include Aboakyer (of the Effutus of Winneba) (Figure 35.1), Bakatue (of Edina or Elmina), Fetu Afahye (Oguaa people, Cape Coast), Bugum (Fire Festival of Dagbon, Yendi, and Tamale), Kundum (Ahanta, Axim) and Homowo (of the Gas, Accra).

In project management terminology, a special event is described as a ‘deliverable’ (Bowdin, Allen, O’Toole, Harris & McDonnell 2006). However, their peculiarities are such that TFs do not fit the ‘deliverable’ designation. A TF is organised and celebrated by the community led by their traditional leaders who initiate the festival and preside over it as the chief celebrants. A deliverable connotes the handiwork of an outsider, typically a consultant, tasked to ‘deliver’ a ‘project’ within a given timeframe. However, for TFs, traditional leaders and Asafo (traditional militia) groups are not ‘outsiders’ or consultants who plan, organise and ‘deliver’ a TF as implied in project management because they are the key participants in any TF.

The product approach greatly enhances the discourse on TFs within the larger context of tourism development and facilitates the generation of theories. The product approach utilises the main attributes/facets of a festival, such as historical origins, life cycle stage, pre-festival activities, event product, promotion, sponsorship and impact (Figure 35.2) as the building blocks for research and write-up on TFs. Since these are common to all TFs, the framework constitutes a basis for scientific enquiry into all TFs.

In their oft-cited work, i.e. Tourism: economic, physical and social impacts, Mathieson and Wall (1982) identify three key elements that underpin the tourism phenomenon, namely the dynamic, static and consequential elements. The dynamic element refers to the movement or travel to and from the destination; specific areas for enquiry here include search for information about the potential destination, travel party size, mode of travel, etc. The static element is about the stay, and sub-areas worth investigating include attractions visited, other activities undertaken, expenditure patterns, visitor satisfaction, attendee profiling, etc. The consequential element, or simply stated, impacts, are the economic, sociocultural and environmental fallouts of the visit. In short, the discourse on TFs as tourism resources should highlight their appeal and ability to induce discretionary travel; specifically, get people to voluntarily relocate to the festival venue.

Unlike the Mathieson and Wall model that focusses more on the demand side of the equation, the product approach encapsulates both the demand and supply elements of events.
Research design and data collection

The two festivals selected for study are celebrated in the Techiman and Bechem TAs, both in the Brong-Ahafo Region (BAR), one of Ghana’s ten administrative regions. BAR is located outside what used to be described as the country’s ‘Golden Triangle’ with Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi as the vertices (Figure 35.1). The area earned that accolade on account of its resource endowment at the peak of the colonial mercantile system. Today, largely on account of the location of her leading attractions, the country’s tourism hub is, somehow, coterminous with the Golden Triangle. It can thus be deduced that the ‘tourist characteristics’ as well as ‘destination characteristics’ (Mathieson & Wall 1982, pp. 22–23) are likely to be similar and comparable, despite the significant differences between the festivals. Apuor is one of Ghana’s oldest TFs, at least 200 years old, whereas Adekyen is barely a decade old (Anane Agyei 2012). Coincidentally, Bechem and Techiman hosted the national Farmers Day awards in 1997 and 2008, respectively, a fact which hotelier interviewees alluded to frequently in responses regarding the economic gains made from festivals (and events).
Festivals as products

A descriptive case-study design was adopted, while qualitative techniques, specifically in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), were used for data collection. The case-study approach was preferred over a cross-sectional method because of the uniqueness of the phenomenon being studied (Sarantakos 1998). Primary data were obtained from key informants, namely traditional authorities and hoteliers, as well as FGD participants. Traditional authorities were recommended by the palaces of the traditional overlords of the two study areas. Participants in the two FGDs were selected accidentally from various segments of the communities, while two hoteliers were conveniently sampled, one each from budget and star-rated facilities.

Interviews and discussions covered wide spectrum of the two TFs. However, in the narrations reported later, a premium was placed on the views of traditional authorities on the origins, benefits and challenges facing each festival, while the views of hoteliers on the economic gains of festivals were elicited. Extracts from FGDs are reported here as substantive matters on their own or as corroborators of other views.

All interviews were conducted in the homes and hotels of the respective interviewees. At Techiman, the FGD with 11 participants took place under a tree near the main (open-air) marketplace, while that of Bechem (involving nine participants) was at a corner of the town’s lorry station. All interviews and FGDs were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then content-analysed. This allowed the data to speak for itself. The transcripts were then returned to the interviewees to check and verify that the notes represented an accurate record of the interviews (Strauss & Corbin 1998). In a couple of instances, some changes had to be made at the request of the interviewees in order to capture what they insisted were an accurate reflection of their sentiments.

Quotes by informants are presented with their anonymous number as well as status and town. In all, 26 people, aged between 38 and 62, participated in the study. Data collection took place between the 17th and 28th of October 2015. The following have been used to identify the interviewees and FGD participants whose quotations were used:

TECH – Techiman; BECH – Bechem; TRA – traditional authority; HOT – hotel proprietor or manager; FGD – FGD participant; M – male; and F – female. Each identifier begins with the anonymous number assigned to interviewees and participants.

Results and discussion

In the following analysis, the variables selected for comparison cover both those common as well as those not so familiar in the literature.

Case #1: Apuor Festival of Techiman; celebrated April/May

Historical origins

Oral tradition has it that about two centuries ago, an epidemic broke out in the Bono Kingdom that claimed several lives in the communities, including Techiman, the capital. Consultations with the gods revealed that the abominations of the people had reached the high heavens, hence the grim mortality rates. The oracle directed that only a ‘rejection’ of such iniquities would turn away the wrath of the
gods. *Apuor* is an Akan word meaning ‘rejection’, a ‘denunciation’ or an end to the evil deeds of the past. Rejection of sinister deeds was symbolised by the subjection of community leaders to public ridicule. Thus, for one week every year, the citizens are at liberty to criticise their leaders without let or hindrance. The objective was that community leaders would then be scrupulous in the discharge of their official duties, while the citizenry were expected to abstain from moral decadence. *Apuor* is, therefore, a celebration of decency, moral uprightness in society. *Apuor* is essentially a commemorative festival that has increasingly been overtaken by cleansing or purification rituals as the public ridicule component has waned over the years.

**Cultural practices (event product)**

Because of its genesis, it is difficult to discuss its economic or other consequences without placing the modern-day *Apuor* in its right context. As one traditional elder put it,

> Ours is a centuries-old tradition; a week is set aside every year for the citizens to castigate traditional elders for their misdeeds and other infractions in the course of the year. But I must confess, however, that the practice is now dying out. Citizens seldom chide the elders these days. In fact, I have never witnessed people pouring scorn on the *Omanhene* (overlord of the traditional area) or other elders since my adolescent days, even though the practice has not been officially proscribed. Participation in the festival keeps growing, nevertheless.

(#1/M/TECH/TRA)

These sentiments were corroborated by a female FGD participant who maintained that

> These days; most citizens are more interested in the merry-making components of the festival. The real purpose of the festival is lost on the attendees. The public ridicule seems to have been popular in those days when a sort of class system prevailed; an upper class and a lower class made up of ordinary citizens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 35.1 An overview of the main attributes/facets of <em>Apuor</em> festival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type/format</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event product(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional product(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key ritualistic component(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is no longer the case even though the family reunions still take place. Young attendees are engaged in merry-making while the elders attend to the purification rites.

(#7/F/TECH/FGD)

Despite the differences in their ages and social status, the two agree on the cultural practices of today. Culture is dynamic; hence, in spite of its inherent virtues, the tradition of public ridicule was bound to give way as happened in Ancient Rome around the Renaissance era (Fridgen 1991). Nevertheless, it would be interesting to undertake an enquiry into the touristic – and sociological – implications of celebrating Apuor as originally intended. For instance, would residents and visiting indigenes participate at the same level? Would non-indigenes be attracted to such a festival?

**Economic benefits (impact)**

On the economic benefits of Apuor, the two hoteliers provided very useful insights. According to the proprietor of a one-star hotel,

There is generally a significant increase in patronage (of hotel rooms) during Apuor festival. However, these annual hikes cannot be compared to the level we witnessed when Techiman hosted the 2008 National Farmers day Awards. Usually, the demand for food and beverages (F & B) does not match demand for rooms, apparently because most guests tend to consume these from family homes during Apuor. The situation was significantly different from the 2008 Farmers Day event when demand for F & B was almost as high as that for rooms.

(#3/M/TECH/HOT)

On her part, the owner-manager of a budget facility added that

The volume of business expands considerably during the celebration of Apuor so we eagerly look forward to that occasion. We were, therefore, highly disappointed a couple of years back when it was called off.

(#2/F/TECH/HOT)

Thus, to a very large extent, the owner of the budget facility acquiesced in the views of her counterpart that Apuor brings about a hike in the hotel business. She, however, made no comparison between demand during Apuor and that of Farmers Day. She also made no reference to demand for F & B. This may be so because in Ghana, it is not obligatory for budget hotels to serve F & B on their premises (Ghana Tourist Board 2005). It is also possible that budget facilities may be shunned by attendees to contemporary events who tend to be high-ranking government officials. Generally, in Ghana, the F & B departments of hotels face competition from low-priced eateries known locally as *chop-bars* (Akyeampong 2007; Briggs 1999). Finally, given that many attendees would be returning home for the event, they may be eating with family and friends rather than commercial establishments.
Case #2: Adekyem of Bechem; celebrated in April–May

Historical origins

Adekyem is a very recent creation that is not even a decade old. But the events it seeks to commemorate are quite old, between two hundred and three hundred years old. Adekyem means ‘sharing’, a direct linkage to Bekyem – the vernacular for Bechem (or the place for sharing). According to history, Ashanti warriors returning from expeditions to the lands in north-western parts of modern Ghana and beyond stopped at a particular place to share their booty. With time, as the Asante empire declined and wave after wave of retreating warriors decided to settle, the place became known after its originating activity – war booty sharing – or ‘Bekyem’ in the vernacular. This was preferred to ‘Behyiase’, an earlier name which literally meant ‘meeting place’. The people of Bechem are full-blooded Ashantis and for over two centuries celebrated no TF except Akwasidae, celebrated in the palace every seventh Sunday to pacify the gods, just as their kith and kin in Ashanti Region proper. However, in 2011, the Omanhene (overlord) of Bechem TA, Nana Fosu Gyeabour Akoto II, instituted Adekyem to commemorate the origins of the TA. The 2011 maiden edition of Adekyem was graced by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the Asantehene or grand overlord of the Asante kingdom. The gesture was meant to underscore their Ashanti origins. An educational endowment fund was launched at the maiden edition (Anane-Agyei 2012).

Cultural practices (event product)

A traditional elder quizzed on the topic revealed that

On the eve of the durbar, the Omanhene (traditional over-lord) and a small group of royals enter the stool room at night to perform rituals. Despite my position, I am not privy to what goes on there. I, however, join in the procession on Saturday mid-morning to the durbar grounds.

(#15/M/BECH/TRA)

Table 35.2 An overview of the main attributes/facets of Adekyem festival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type/format</th>
<th>Commemorative/community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event product(s)</td>
<td>Besides the grand durbar of chiefs and people, Adekyem lacks a core product, obviously as a result of its recent origins. It may take a while for one product to crystallise as the core.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional product(s)</td>
<td>There is a miscellany of event activities that should pass for secondary products common with other festivals. For Adekyem, the most outstanding ones are the exchange of gifts and the display of voluntarism. Besides being innovative, they also capture the essence and spirit of the festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key ritualistic component(s)</td>
<td>None – nontraditional festival.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This revelation confirms what is in the literature (e.g. Anane-Agyei 2012) that the climax or main event product is the durbar of chiefs and people. As stated from the outset, exoteric rituals undertaken out of public view cannot pass as touristic events. One can, thus, posit that after the inception of a festival, a couple of add-ons eventually crystallise as core event products. It may, therefore, take a while for some activity(ies) to emerge as cultural practices or event product associated with Adekyem.

Notwithstanding its recent origins, Adekyem was bound to have one or the other impact. On economic gains, one traditional leader had this to say:

> Since the institution of Adekyem in 2011, we have enjoyed an appreciable increase in trading activities during celebrations. I am not in the hospitality industry which is of interest to you but the increased sales in basic goods and services is very evident during celebrations. For me, however, the occasion is as culturally significant as its economic fall-out.

(#{15}/M/BECH/TRA)

This view was corroborated by a FGD participant who remarked that

> Well, I feel satisfied with the rise of commercial activities. As a trader myself, I have over the past two years made extra sales during the festival. Remember that the essence of the festival is the exchange of gifts and I believe that most visitors (i.e. indigenes living outside Bechem) might purchase their gifts from elsewhere, so only a small percentage of gifts are bought locally. Nevertheless, I’m okay with business during the celebration.

(#{21}/F/BECH/FGD)

The foregoing quotes indicate a consensus about the potential economic gains to be made from Adekyem, especially because of the gift-exchange involved. Meanwhile, hotel proprietors had these sentiments to share:

> I have observed an increase in business during the celebration of Adekyem, though I will not say the hotel is over-booked. Most of the guests are natives living in Sunyani, Kumasi, Accra and Techiman. Demand reaches its peak from Friday to Sunday.

(#{16}/M/BECH/HOT)

While confirming this scenario, the second proprietor added that

> Adekyem festival has really resulted in increase in demand for our products. It’s our third year and there has been visible expansion in sales during celebrations. Of course, the demand for rooms far exceeds that for food and beverages but that is not peculiar to us. Other occasions when we do such brisk business are the funerals of dignitaries but Adekyem is exceptional because it is a community-wide event.

(#{17}/BECH/HOT)
It is clear that the two hoteliers enjoy a boom in business during the festival, a feature that is common in all major TF towns around the country. However, one can infer from the narratives that the ‘pulling power’ of Adekyem is not as high as with older festivals. Similarly, the resulting increase in general commercial activities is moderate.

Challenges

Though a fairly recent festival, one cannot rule out challenges associated with Adekyem. According to the traditional authority,

Ours is a relatively ‘young’ festival; it may not be as old and popular as Munufie or Apuor. I want to believe that the economic gains from these older festivals in the region might have influenced the Omanhene into instituting Adekyem. It is currently in its formative stages and so we cannot point to any definitive challenge(s). Perhaps, as an evolving TF, we can rather talk of missing activities (event products) that could be added to place Adekyem on the same pedestal as the established ones in the region and beyond.

(#15/M/BECH/TRA)

However, other interviewees expressed different views, one of which is cited here. An FGD participant maintained that

The composition of the organising committee should change drastically. It should include more of the young people, possibly event management professionals and less of the traditional elders. Such people serving on the committee should be able to inject more innovative ideas that will increase the volume of attendees, especially non-indigenes.

(#22/F/BECH/FGD)

The last quote touches on a very sensitive topic. By definition, the organisation of a TF is the preserve of traditional authorities; elected or appointed local and central government officials only lend a helping hand. Though an organising committee comprises a cross section of the community, e.g. farmers, traders, the youth and major migrant groups, it is, invariably, dominated by traditional leaders. In the Ghanaian setting, it is not common to have an ‘ordinary’ citizen chairing a committee when there is a chief around. In traditional matters such as a TF, it is indeed rare; yet, young and educated members of a community might have more progressive ideas. The counterargument is that a TF risks being unduly modernised or even commercialised if the role of traditional authorities is played down. The problem is, therefore, not likely to be peculiar to Adekyem.

Conclusion

TFs have in recent times attracted increased attention as the leading triggers of domestic tourist flow in Ghana. From a tourism perspective, however, the conceptual bases of most scholarly works are as convoluted as the festival types. This chapter sought to demonstrate that the product approach enriches the discourse on TFs within the larger context of
tourism development by bringing convergence to an otherwise disparate field. The product attributes are common to all TFs, irrespective of type, scale, age or level of popularity. Thus, despite the obvious differences between them, the framework could be systematically applied to a comparative study of Apuor and Adekyem festivals. In fact it could have been applied to a comprehensive case study of each of them – and be meaningfully replicated anywhere else.

Just as a product has value, price, sellers, etc. and is found in every household, so one can identify attributes, facets or phases in every TF to facilitate thorough appraisal. Each attribute can be subjected to in-depth analysis either in a case or comparative study. Another advantage is that it can be easily adapted to suit the research objectives and design. For practice, all stakeholders, from host communities and sponsors to attendees and municipal authorities, should easily relate to a ‘product’, as either producers, intermediaries, patrons or regulators.

References


