

Awareness, Familiarity, And Extent Of Virtual Reality Use Among Tourists At Selected Recreation Centres In Southwest Nigeria

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Oluwagbemi E O¹, Adeyemo A I¹, Adetola B O¹

¹Department of Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria,

Correspondence: Oluwagbemi E O, oluwagbemio@futa.edu.ng

Abstract

Virtual Reality (VR) has emerged as a transformative technology reshaping tourist experiences globally, yet limited research exists on tourists' awareness, familiarity, and actual use of VR in developing economies. This study investigated the level of awareness and familiarity with VR technologies among tourists at selected recreation centres in Southwest Nigeria and examined the types and extent of VR use at these sites. A structured questionnaire was administered to tourists who had completed VR sessions at seven recreation centres across Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States, generating 385 valid responses that were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results showed that 82% of respondents had previously heard of VR, while 48.6% rated themselves as very familiar with the technology. Approximately 66% had used VR before visiting the centres, with 36% describing their prior use as frequent. Gaming constituted the dominant application both in the past (46.2%) and on-site (48%), followed by general recreation (40% on-site), with education and tourism applications remaining comparatively limited. A substantial majority (66.2%) strongly agreed that prior awareness of VR influenced their decision to visit the centres. The study concludes that awareness and familiarity with VR among tourists in Southwest Nigeria are relatively high and serve as significant drivers of patronage at VR recreation centres. However, VR continues to be used predominantly for gaming rather than tourism-oriented or educational purposes. Recommendations urge recreation centre operators and tourism stakeholders to reposition VR as a genuine tourism product rather than solely an entertainment device.

Keywords: Virtual Reality, Awareness, Familiarity, Immersive Tourism, Recreation Centres, Southwest Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the most resilient and dynamic sectors of the global economy, and in the contemporary tourism landscape, consumer preferences have shifted markedly toward experiential, personalized, and technology-enhanced encounters. This evolution has been accelerated by rapid advancements in digital technologies, particularly immersive tools such as Virtual Reality (VR). VR is defined as a computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional environment that users can interact with in a seemingly real and physical manner through specialised electronic equipment, including head-mounted displays, motion sensors, and haptic feedback devices (Ouerghemmi *et al.*, 2023).

The global market for virtual tourism and VR applications has witnessed explosive growth. The virtual tourism market was valued at approximately USD 8.05 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 30.54 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24.9% from 2025 to 2030 (Grand View Research, 2025). Other reports place the 2025 market value around USD 14.56 billion, projecting growth to USD 32.81 billion by 2030 at a CAGR of 17.6% (The Business Research Company, 2026). Broader VR market forecasts are even more optimistic, with some projections estimating the overall virtual reality industry could exceed USD 435 billion by 2030 (Market Data Forecast, 2025). Within tourism specifically, VR enables virtual previews of destinations, interactive storytelling, gamified explorations, virtual heritage tours, and simulated recreational experiences, allowing tourists to “visit” remote or inaccessible sites and enhancing pre-visit decision-making (Fan *et al.*, 2022; Nguyen *et al.*, 2025).

Beyond destination marketing, VR has found increasing application in dedicated recreation and entertainment centres, where users engage in leisure-oriented immersive activities such as virtual adventures, multiplayer games, and social entertainment. In Nigeria, tourism holds substantial untapped potential, yet the sector continues to face challenges including infrastructural limitations and low visitor engagement at many sites. Southwest Nigeria, comprising Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun States, represents a particularly strategic context for examining VR adoption, with Lagos State emerging as the epicentre of immersive entertainment, hosting facilities such as VR Place Nigeria, Enzo Reality, Immersia Virtual Reality, and Engulf VR. Similar, though fewer, VR outlets are operational or emerging in Ibadan (Oyo State) and in Osun State, reflecting the gradual diffusion of immersive technologies beyond Lagos into secondary urban centres (Vanguard News, 2025).

Despite this nascent growth, systematic empirical research on how VR influences tourists in Nigerian recreation centres remains limited. Most global VR tourism studies have concentrated on destination marketing, cultural heritage sites, or contexts in developed economies, while fewer investigations have focused on leisure-oriented recreation centres in developing-country settings, where factors such as digital infrastructure variability, affordability, and cultural perceptions of technology play critical roles (Pratisto *et al.*, 2022; Basiru *et al.*, 2024). Nigerian-specific studies on VR have largely been exploratory, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of tourists' actual awareness, familiarity, and patterns of use of VR in real recreation-centre environments.

The adoption and effective utilisation of VR in Nigeria's tourism and recreation sector remain limited and largely underdeveloped (Jude, 2020; Taoheed *et al.*, 2024). High acquisition and maintenance costs of VR hardware, frequent power outages, unreliable internet connectivity, and limited local content development continue to constrain the sector (Jude, 2020; Ada-okungbowa, 2025). Additionally, low levels of public awareness and familiarity with VR technology among a substantial segment of potential users, coupled with concerns about health effects such as cybersickness and perceived high costs, limit widespread adoption and repeat visitation (Insightful3D, 2026; Ibrahim, 2023). Existing Nigerian studies on VR

awareness and barriers, though useful, remain scarce and are rarely grounded in direct, on-site assessment of tourists immediately after a VR experience (Ibrahim, 2023).

A core strength of VR lies in its capacity to generate powerful psychological experiences, notably immersion and presence, which are central to explaining why VR can outperform conventional media in evoking emotional responses and driving behavioural intentions. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that strong immersion and presence in VR experiences trigger deeper tourist engagement across cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Fan *et al.*, 2022; Nguyen *et al.*, 2025). However, before such psychological and behavioural mechanisms can be meaningfully studied or harnessed by recreation centre operators, it is important to first establish a baseline understanding of how aware potential visitors are of VR technology, how familiar they consider themselves to be with it, and the extent and manner in which they actually use it, both prior to and during their visits.

This baseline understanding is particularly critical in the Nigerian context. Nigerian-specific studies on VR have largely been exploratory or concentrated on real estate visualisation and general tourism marketing (Basiru *et al.*, 2024), leaving a significant gap in understanding tourists' actual, on-site awareness, familiarity, and patterns of VR use in recreation-centre environments. Recreation centre managers and operators in Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States currently lack evidence-based insights into the awareness levels of their prospective patrons and the manner in which VR is actually being consumed once visitors arrive. Without such understanding, many facilities risk misjudging the readiness of their target market, under-investing in awareness-building, or misallocating VR content toward uses that do not reflect visitors' actual interests and prior exposure.

This research gap has significant practical consequences. If facility operators overestimate public awareness and familiarity with VR, they may fail to provide adequate orientation or guidance to first-time users, potentially undermining the visitor experience. Conversely, if they underestimate the extent to which patrons already use VR technology, for instance predominantly for gaming rather than tourism-oriented purposes, they may miss opportunities to reposition their offerings as genuine immersive-tourism products rather than purely recreational novelties. Addressing these gaps is therefore essential not only for improving visitor experience design but also for the broader positioning of VR recreation centres as legitimate contributors to Nigeria's tourism economy (Taoheed *et al.*, 2024).

This study addresses this gap by extracting and reporting findings on two specific objectives of a wider mixed-methods study on VR and tourist engagement in Southwest Nigeria: (i) to assess the level of awareness and familiarity with VR technologies among tourists visiting the selected study sites, and (ii) to identify the types and extent of use of VR technology in the study sites. By focusing on these two objectives, the study provides evidence-based insights that can guide recreation centre operators, tourism policymakers, and technology providers seeking to harness VR for enhanced visitor experiences and the sustainable growth of immersive tourism in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This study was conducted in selected Virtual Reality (VR) outlets across Lagos, Osun, and Oyo States in Southwest Nigeria. These states were purposely selected to reflect diverse socio-economic and technological environments, ranging from a highly urbanised innovation and entertainment hub (Lagos) to emerging recreational and tourism technology markets (Osun and Oyo). Lagos State, Nigeria's commercial and technological powerhouse, has emerged as the epicentre of immersive entertainment, hosting several dedicated VR recreation centres, while Oyo State (with Ibadan as its capital) and Osun State represent

important, though comparatively less developed, emerging markets for digital and immersive tourism technologies. The selection of the three states provides a comparative basis for understanding VR awareness and use across different spatial, infrastructural, and socio-economic contexts in Southwest Nigeria.

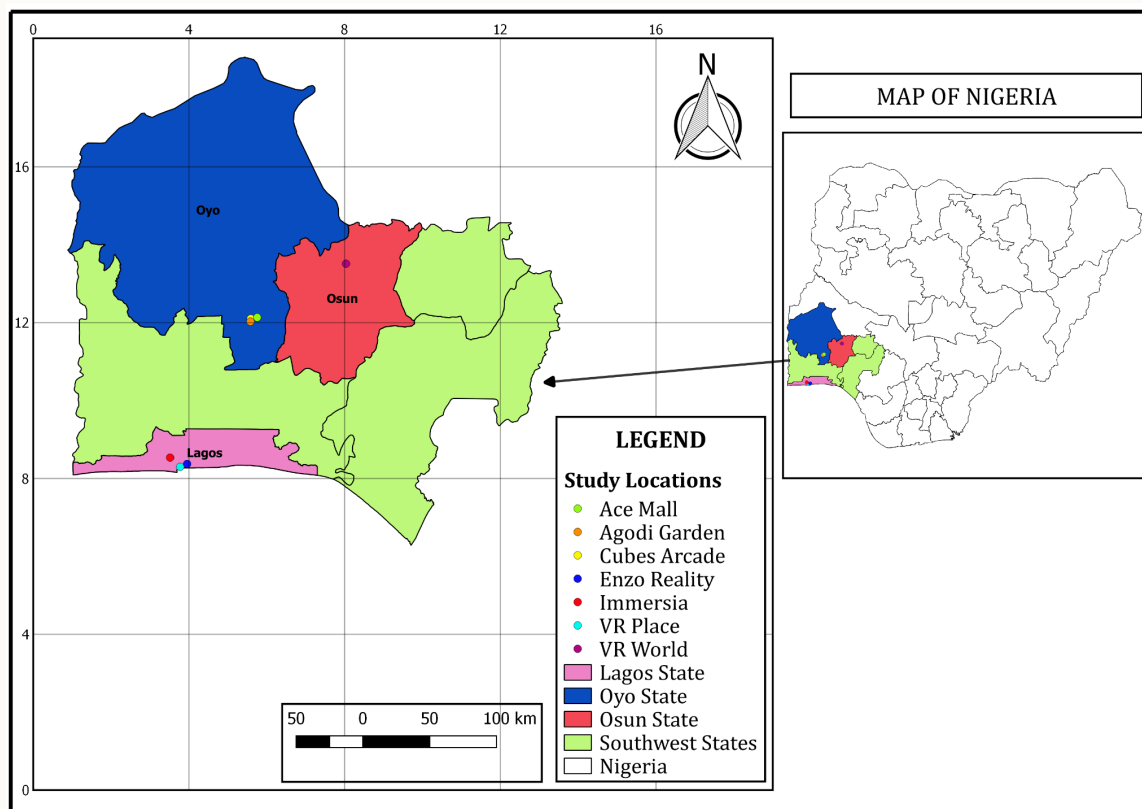


Figure 1 - Map Showing the selected states and study location in Nigeria

Population and Sampling Procedure

The population of this study comprised tourists and visitors who had completed Virtual Reality (VR) experiences at selected immersive recreational centres in Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States. A key inclusion criterion was that respondents must have completed a VR session at the point of data collection, an approach that reduces recall bias and enhances the accuracy of experiential responses. Due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame of VR users in Nigeria, a purposive sampling technique was first used to identify eligible participants, followed by a convenience sampling approach in which questionnaires were administered to willing participants at the point of exit from VR experiences.

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, fourteen (14) VR centres were initially identified across Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States through online searches, field reconnaissance, and preliminary inquiries. In the second stage, a set of inclusion criteria – availability of functional and operational VR systems, accessibility to the researcher, consistent customer patronage, and willingness of management to participate – was applied to arrive at seven (7) VR centres selected for the final study, comprising three (3) centres in Lagos State, three (3) centres in Oyo State, and one (1) centre in Osun State.

Sample Size

The quantitative sample size for this study was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for estimating sample size in large or unknown populations. The formula is expressed as:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_0 = required sample size,

Z = Z-score corresponding to the confidence level (1.96 for 95%),

p = estimated population proportion (0.5 used for maximum variability),

e = margin of error (0.05).

$$n_0 = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2} = 384 \text{ respondents}$$

This calculation yielded a minimum required sample size of approximately 384 respondents. To account for potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, a total of 420 questionnaires were distributed across the seven selected VR centres (approximately 60 per site), with 385 valid responses retained for analysis.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from visitors who experienced VR technologies at the selected recreational outlets. The instrument was developed based on the study objectives and relevant literature on immersive tourism and technology adoption in tourism contexts. For the purpose of this paper, the two sections of the questionnaire relevant to the objectives addressed were: Section A – Socio-Demographic Characteristics, and Section B – Awareness and Familiarity with VR Technologies, which also captured the types, frequency, and extent of respondents' use of VR technology. The questionnaire was administered physically on-site immediately after participants completed their VR sessions, to ensure that responses reflected immediate experiential impressions and minimised recall bias.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distribution and percentages, to summarise respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and their level of awareness, familiarity with, and extent of use of VR technology. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28, while Microsoft Excel was used for the presentation of charts and graphical illustrations.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 385 valid responses were retained for analysis. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (51.2%) were male, while 48.8% were female. The majority of the respondents (48.1%) were within the age range of 18–27 years, and 63.1% were single, with 55.4% having tertiary education. All the respondents (100%) were Nigerians, and majority (45.7%) resided in Lagos, 55.1% of the respondents were Christians, and majority (40.8%) earned an average monthly income of less than ₦50,000.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 385)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	197	51.2
	Female	188	48.8
Age Group	<18 years	92	23.9
	18–27 years	185	48.1
	28–37 years	71	18.4
	38–47 years	31	8.1
	48–57 years	4	1.0
	58 years and above	2	0.5
Marital Status	Single	243	63.1
	Married	114	29.6
	Divorced	24	6.2
	Widowed	4	1.0
Education	No formal education	29	7.5
	Primary education	73	19.0
	Secondary education	70	18.2
	Tertiary education	213	55.4
Nationality	Nigerian	385	100.0
Religion	Christianity	212	55.1
	Islam	134	34.8
	Traditional belief	39	10.1
Monthly Income	Less than ₦50,000	157	40.8
	₦51,000–₦100,000	95	24.7
	₦101,000–₦150,000	30	7.8

	₦151,000–₦200,000	27	7.0
	Above ₦200,000	76	19.7

Awareness and Familiarity with VR Technologies

Table 2 shows that a large majority of respondents (82%) had heard of VR technology before their visit to the site, indicating a generally high level of pre-visit awareness of VR among tourists in the study area. In terms of familiarity, 48.6% of respondents described themselves as very familiar with VR technologies, 27.0% as slightly familiar, 15.1% as not familiar at all, while 9.4% considered themselves somewhat familiar.

With regard to actual prior experience, 66% of the respondents had used VR technology before visiting the destinations studied, while 34% had never used VR technology before visiting. Among the respondents, 36% had used VR frequently in the past, 20% had used it occasionally, 13% had rarely used it, while 31% had not used it before.

Table 2: Awareness, familiarity, and prior use of VR technology among respondents

Item	Category	Percentage (%)
Prior awareness of VR before visit	Aware	82.0
	Not aware	18.0
Level of familiarity with VR	Very familiar	48.6
	Slightly familiar	27.0
	Somewhat familiar	9.4
	Not familiar at all	15.1
Prior use of VR before visiting site	Have used VR before	66.0
	Have never used VR before	34.0
Frequency of past VR use	Frequently	36.0
	Occasionally	20.0
	Rarely	13.0
	Not used before	31.0

Types and Extent of Use of VR Technology

On the capacity in which respondents had used VR in the past, a larger percentage (46.2%) reported having used VR for gaming, 18.7% had used it in an educational capacity, 2.9% had used it for relaxation, 1.3%

had used it in tourism specifically, while 30.9% had never used it in time past as shown in Figure 2. At the study sites themselves, Figure 3 shows that most respondents (48%) used VR for gaming, 40% used it for recreation, while 12% used it specifically for tourism-related purposes.

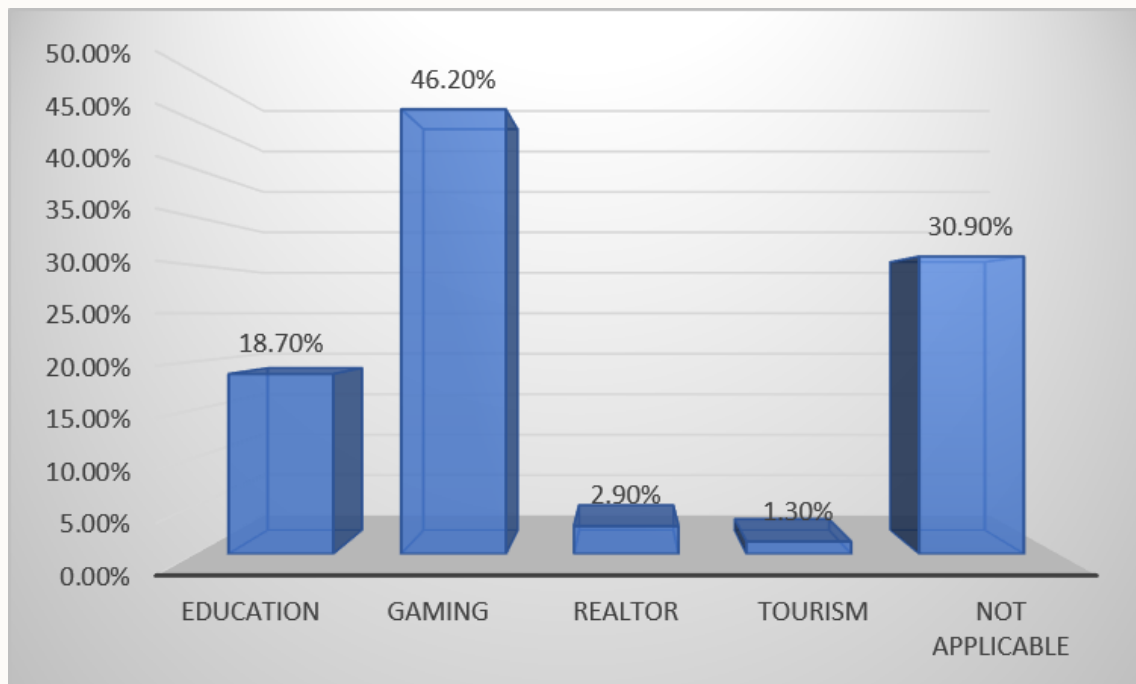


Figure 2 - Capacity in which respondents have used VR in the past

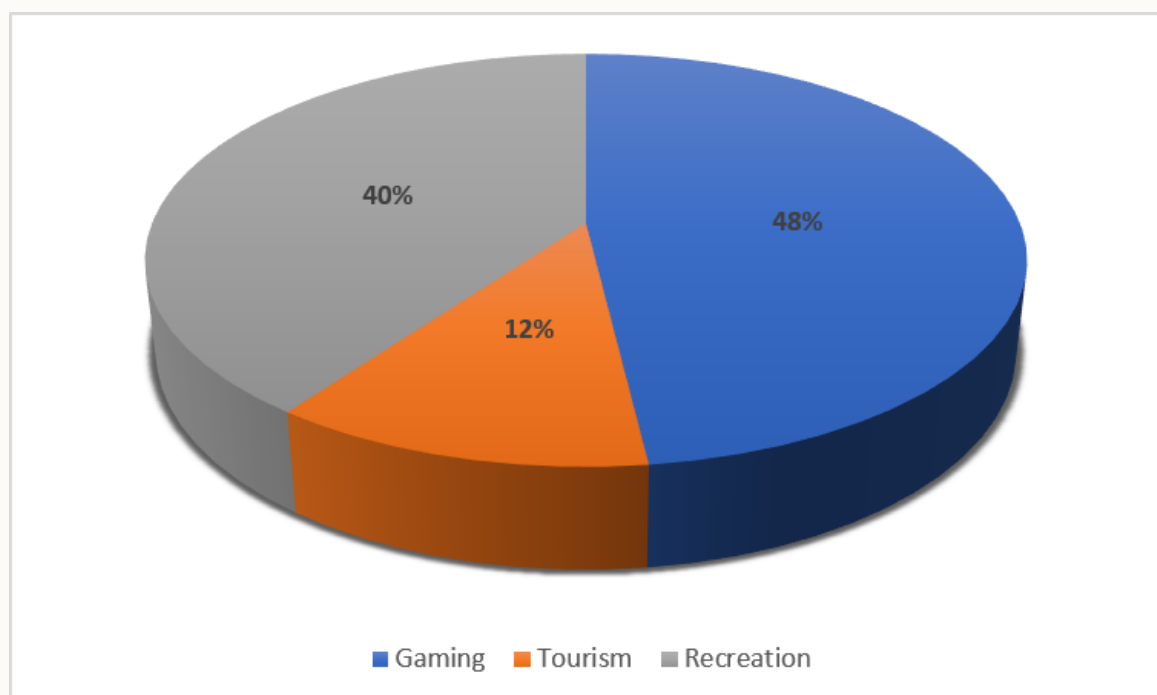


Figure 3 - Respondents VR application in the site

Figure 4 shows that respondents' prior awareness of VR appeared to be an important driver of patronage: more than half of the respondents (66.2%) strongly agreed that their prior awareness of VR influenced their decision to visit the site, 17.4% agreed, 7.0% disagreed, 4.9% were neutral, while 4.4% strongly disagreed that their prior awareness influenced their decision to visit.

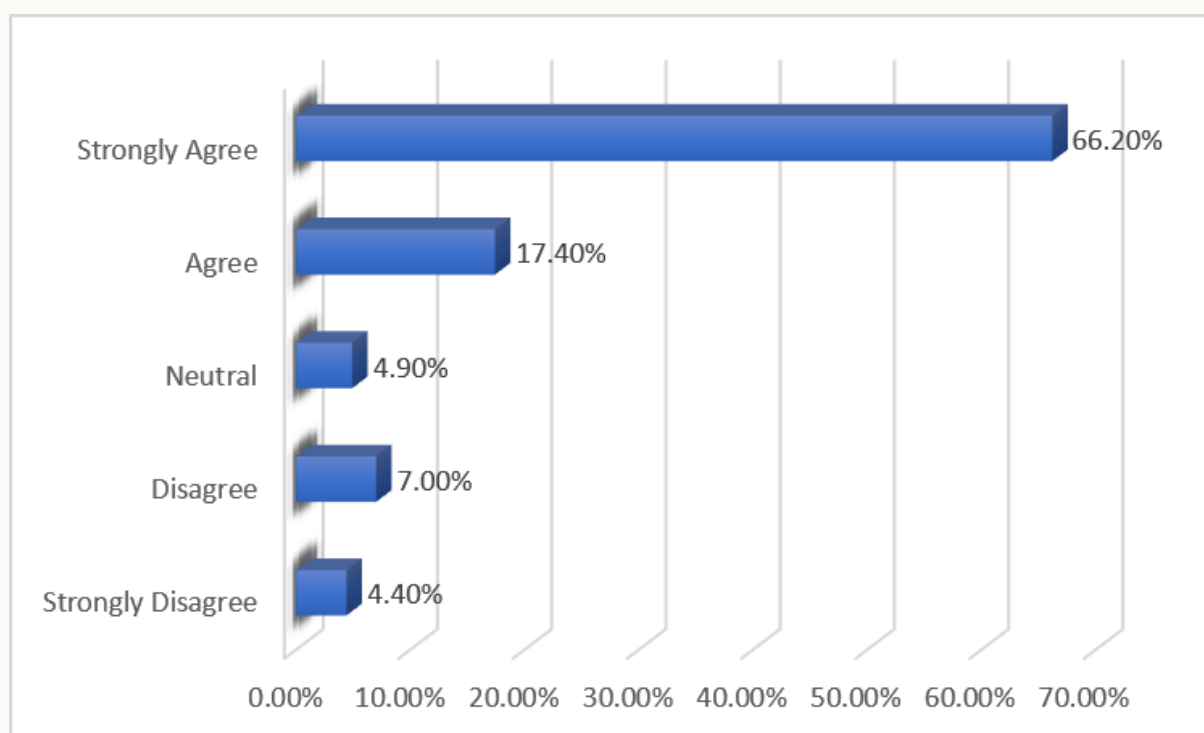


Figure 4: Influence of prior awareness of VR on respondents' decision to visit the site

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a relatively high level of awareness of VR technology among tourists visiting recreation centres in Southwest Nigeria, with 82% of respondents having heard of VR prior to their visit. This finding contrasts somewhat with earlier assertions that VR adoption in Nigeria's tourism and recreation sector remains limited and largely underdeveloped due to low levels of awareness among potential users (Jude, 2020; Taoheed *et al.*, 2024). A plausible explanation is that the tourists sampled in this study were drawn specifically from patrons of VR recreation centres, a population that, by virtue of self-selection, is likely to already possess some prior exposure to or interest in VR, unlike the general Nigerian population. This is broadly consistent with Ibrahim (2023), who similarly found that awareness of VR is often uneven across different segments of Nigerian tourists, being considerably higher among urban, youthful, and digitally engaged populations than among the wider public.

The finding show that a larger percentage of the respondents were very familiar with VR technologies also lends support to the view that Lagos, and to a lesser extent Oyo and Osun States, are becoming important hubs for immersive entertainment (Vanguard News, 2025; Basiru *et al.*, 2024), where the establishment of several dedicated VR recreation centres appears to be gradually building a base of technologically familiar patrons. Nonetheless, the presence of a non-trivial proportion of respondents who were “not familiar at all” with VR suggests that awareness gaps persist even among tourists who eventually visit these centres, corroborating Ibrahim's (2023) submission that uneven awareness remains an ongoing constraint to broader VR adoption in Nigerian tourism.

With respect to the extent and types of VR use, the finding that VR was predominantly used for gaming, both in respondents' past experiences and at the study sites, rather than for tourism-specific purposes, reinforces concerns raised in the literature that VR in Nigerian recreation centres tends to be positioned primarily as an entertainment product rather than a deliberate tourism or destination-marketing tool (Jude, 2020; Kumar, 2025). This pattern mirrors global observations that VR's capabilities extend well beyond

gaming to include virtual heritage tours and destination previews (Fan *et al.*, 2022; Ouerghemmi *et al.*, 2023), capabilities that appear to be comparatively underutilised within the Southwest Nigerian recreation-centre context studied.

The relatively high proportion of respondents reporting frequent past use of VR, combined with the majority who had used VR before visiting the study sites, suggests an encouraging level of technology readiness among the sampled tourist population, which could support the deepening of VR-based immersive tourism if content and applications are diversified beyond gaming. At the same time, the fact that a number of respondents had never used VR technology before their visit, and that some others were only somewhat familiar or not familiar at all with VR, is consistent with earlier warnings that infrastructural constraints, cost concerns, and limited local content continue to constrain widespread VR familiarity in Nigeria (Insightful3D, 2026; Ada-okungbowa, 2025; Pratisto *et al.*, 2022).

Importantly, the finding that a majority of respondents (66.2%) strongly agreed that their prior awareness of VR influenced their decision to visit the recreation centres underscores the strategic value of awareness-building and marketing communication in driving patronage of VR-based tourism and recreation facilities. This finding aligns with the broader argument that VR's disruptive potential in tourism depends not only on the availability of the technology itself but also on the extent to which potential visitors are made aware of, and familiar with, its capabilities before visiting (Ouerghemmi *et al.*, 2023; Hong, 2026).

Taken together, these findings suggest that while awareness and familiarity with VR technology among tourists visiting recreation centres in Southwest Nigeria are encouragingly high, the extent of use remains concentrated in gaming rather than broader immersive-tourism applications, and a residual segment of visitors remains unfamiliar with the technology. This has important implications for how recreation centre operators and tourism stakeholders in Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States design, market, and diversify their VR offerings.

The concentration of VR use in Lagos, and to a lesser extent Oyo and Osun States, also reflects the broader geographic pattern of VR diffusion described in the literature, where Lagos State's high urbanisation, youthful demographic, growing middle class, and relatively better digital infrastructure have facilitated the establishment of several dedicated VR recreation centres, while similar, though fewer, outlets are only gradually emerging in Ibadan and Osun State (Vanguard News, 2025). This uneven distribution of VR infrastructure across the three states studied may itself contribute to the observed variation in awareness and familiarity, as tourists in Lagos are likely to have had more cumulative exposure to VR marketing, word-of-mouth, and physical facilities than their counterparts in the comparatively less developed markets of Oyo and Osun States.

The predominance of gaming as the primary type of VR use also raises important questions about how “immersive tourism” is currently being experienced and understood by patrons of these facilities. Although immersive tourism, as a concept, emphasises deep sensory, cognitive, and emotional involvement that moves beyond passive sightseeing (Pratisto *et al.*, 2022), the findings suggest that many patrons currently encounter VR recreation centres primarily as gaming venues rather than as deliberate immersive-tourism destinations. This suggests an opportunity, rather than a limitation: because a majority of visitors already demonstrate meaningful familiarity with, and frequent prior use of, VR technology, recreation centre operators are well positioned to introduce tourism-specific VR content, such as virtual tours of Nigerian heritage sites or nature reserves, to patrons who already possess the technological readiness to engage with such content, without needing to first overcome fundamental unfamiliarity with VR as a medium.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the level of awareness and familiarity with VR technologies among tourists visiting selected recreation centres in Southwest Nigeria and identified the types and extent of VR use at these centres. The findings show that awareness and familiarity with VR among tourists patronising these centres are relatively high, and that prior awareness of VR is a significant driver of the decision to visit. However, the extent and types of VR use remain heavily tilted towards gaming rather than tourism-oriented or educational applications, and a meaningful minority of visitors remain unfamiliar with, or have never used, VR technology. Theoretically, the findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the pre-experience conditions, namely awareness and familiarity, that precede the psychological and behavioural mechanisms (such as immersion, presence, and engagement) commonly emphasised in global VR tourism research. The study demonstrates quite practically that tourists patronising VR recreation centres in Southwest Nigeria are not a technologically naive population; rather, they arrive with substantial prior awareness and, in many cases, frequent prior use of VR, a fact that recreation centre operators and tourism policymakers can leverage in designing more tourism-specific and less purely game-oriented VR content.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that recreation centre operators in Lagos, Oyo, and Osun States diversify their VR content beyond gaming to include virtual heritage tours, destination previews, and other tourism-oriented experiences that can better position VR recreation centres as genuine gateways into immersive tourism rather than purely entertainment venues. Tourism policymakers and technology providers should also invest in targeted awareness campaigns to close the residual awareness gap among potential visitors, particularly outside Lagos, while addressing the underlying infrastructural and cost barriers that continue to constrain broader familiarity with, and use of, VR technology in Nigeria.

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