

Improving the Tourists' Destination Choice through Tourism Promotional Campaign in Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

Author's Details: ⁽¹⁾Nelly Nyatichi Marita ⁽²⁾Nevile Ogetii Marita

Department of Tourism Management, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.

Abstract

The study investigated the effects of the Tourism Promotional Campaign on tourists' destination choice of Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya. It was informed by the classic line of thought and the alternative line of thought models which focuses on Tourist Destination Choice. The research design used was descriptive survey and explanatory which enabled the researcher to gather data from the population. The target population was tourists visiting Maasai Mara National Reserve for the first six months of 2015. The simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 232 tourists. Questionnaires were used to collect the relevant quantitative data, with cronbach alpha being used to determine the reliability of the scales used. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, mean, and standard deviation and presented using tables and charts. The researcher also used inferential statistics (t-test) and employed a Pearson correlation to show the relationships that exist between the variables. Multiple regressions analysis was also performed to show the causal effect. The coefficients of estimate analysis indicated that the tourism promotional campaign ($\beta_2 = 0.242$) with a p -value = 0.000 had a significant and positive effect on tourist destination choice. This infers that the use of tourism promotional campaigns enhances the destination choice. The study will be of great value because it will help the management of the Maasai Mara National Reserve to improve their destinations by the use of appropriate tourism promotional campaigns, besides it will form a base of study for other researchers who may be interested in the same field of study. Again it will help other management of tourism sites to develop an image and engage in marketing strategies in order to create a positive attitude on its customers/tourists to ensure that their destinations are chosen. Also the customers/tourists will be enlightened on various tourists' destination choices by use of appropriate tourism promotional campaigns. The study was restricted to Maasai Mara National Reserve, because of the accessibility of the area, lack of enough financial resources and also the limited time. The author recommends the management of the Maasai Mara National Reserve to put more emphasis on tourists' destination choices in order to enhance customer satisfaction. This study would be of significance to service industries as it will point how tourists' destination choice can impact on their tourism site performance.

Keywords: Promotional Tourism Campaigns, Tourists' destination choice, Customer satisfaction, Marketing strategies

Introduction

It is really important to follow some key aspects or elements expressed like having a deep understanding of the market and its environment. (Drummond, Graeme, Ensor, John, & Marketing, 2001). In this case, the marketing manager will have to delimitate the relevant market, to develop market segmentation, to evaluate segments: size, growth of demand and to develop a competition analysis based on the competitive positioning.

Also it is important in strategic marketing to follow a deep internal analysis in order to see tangibles and intangible factors and resources. Both resources are really important to take into account marketing strategies; some aspects are related to evaluating the importance of intellectual capital, for example. The distinctive capacities and skills and organization routines (Prahalad *et al.*, 2004) are also crucial in order to determine future strengths key term in marketing strategy or weaknesses very widely used term too and their impact on future business success.

The formulation of objectives and strategies oriented to market thinking in customers and competitors instead in manufacturing capacities, or in what the company can do are also important and are helping to define competitive advantage (Kotler, 2000). A marketing strategy is made of several interrelated elements. The first and most important is market choice which is directly related to choosing the markets to be served. Product planning includes the specific products the company sells. The makeup of the product line, and the design of individual offerings in the line. Another element is the distribution system: the wholesale and retail channels through which the product moves to the people who ultimately buy it and use it.

The overall communications strategy employs advertising to tell potential customers about the product through radio, television, direct mail, and public print and personal selling to deploy a sales force to call on potential customers, urge them to buy, and take orders. Finally, pricing, is an important element of any marketing program and is one of the most directed marketing elements in the creation of value for shareholders (Doyle, 2000). The company must set the product prices that different classes of customers will pay and determine the margins or commissions to compensate agents, wholesalers, and retailers for moving the product to ultimate users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist Destination Choice.

Tourist destination choice has been defined as a transformation of motivation in purchasing action (Buhalis, 2000). The destination choice is made by an alternative evaluation based on individual preferences and goals, while the evaluation of tourist product is based on individual evaluative criteria. Factors that influence consumer behavior can be internal and external to the individual. Among the internal determinants are social and personal, while the external ones include confidence in the travel agency, the overall image of alternatives, previous travel experience, travel constraints (time, cost, etc.), degree of perceived risk, etc. Among the major influences of individual travel behavior are family, reference groups, social classes, culture and subculture that determine an individual's personality, learning, motivation, perception (of alternatives) and attitudes.

Eilat and Einav (2004) add marketing strategy to be one of the factors that influence destination choice, which, according to him, is important for both developed and less-developed countries, while fashion, common border, common language, and distance are also important determinants especially in less-developed countries (Eilat & Einav, 2004).

To understand consumer behavior, it is necessary to examine the complex interaction of many influencing internal and external factors. Moutinho's (1987) study deals with determinants of behaviour, culture and reference group influences, the relationships between individuals and their environments, perceived risks, and family decision processes (Eilat, 2004). Numerous literature studies identify social, cultural, personal, and psychological factors that influence destination choice.

Among the social factors are reference groups, family, roles and status. Reference groups - family, religion, ethnic groups, trade union, neighborhood etc. - can be classified by primary personal contact with a group and secondary occasionally, formal trade union and informal neighborhood. Personal factors include age, life cycle stage, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyle and personality (Bonn *et al.*, 2005).

Psychological factors are perhaps the most complex and difficult to understand and consist of motivation (theories of human motivation: Marshall, Freud, Veblen, Herzberg, Maslow), perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes. Another important determinant of tourist's behaviour towards destinations and services is the tourist's self-image – what a person thinks he or she is and what a person wants to be. There is a relationship between

self-image and product image that determines tourist's behavior towards destinations and services. Perception and cognition influence the evaluation and judgmental process. Attitude and intention, created by learning and experience are other important concepts in tourists' behavior discussions (Bonn *et al.*, 2005).

The importance of previous travel experience in the destination choice has got wide discussions between the researchers. Many of them consider previous experience on the destination to be a significant factor in the destination choice process. The relationship between tourists' choice of behavioral attributes and destination loyalty has been investigated by a more recent study of Chen and Gursoy (2001). According to them the influence of past travel behaviour on destination choice and destination loyalty are not significant, however tourists with more travel experiences tend to be more confident about the destination they selected (Chen & Gursoy, 2001).

Tourism Promotion Campaign and Tourist Destination Choice

The promotional activity and campaign that an organization adopts to promote its tourism industry are intended to introduce the country's image to international visitors. Robin *et al.*, (2002) observe that the marketing of tourism destinations has traditionally been heavily oriented toward promotional activity. He demonstrates that destination marketing may achieve greater success by focusing on improving destination competitiveness, which implies that the needs of both destinations and stakeholders should occupy a more strategic perspective in tourism planning, development and marketing.

At present, the marketing campaigns conducted by destination marketing organizations are centered mainly on the promotion of the destination as a whole (Gomezlj and Mihalic, 2008). The method of promotion refers to the means used to implement promotional activities and includes promotional tools, information channels and promotional programs.

Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001) note that the main information sources used in executing promotional activities include formal interpersonal sources, external formal sources, commercial sources, and professional sources. They point out the importance of the internet as a source of information for consumers to become familiar with this emerging world of information. Thus, the term information source refers to the channel for providing information regarding the destination attributes.

Truong and King (2009) demonstrate that the tourism attributes defined as the key characteristics of a given holiday destination may be conveniently grouped under the heading. Thus, analytically, and often both logically and temporally, push factors precede pull factors. Tourists are pushed by their need to decide whether to go, and then the tourists are pulled by destinations' attributes to decide where to go. Therefore, promotional activities are very important for a destination to be successful in attracting more tourists.

Bologlu and Mangalolu (2001) note that tour operators and travel agents have multiple and critical functions in the tourism market because they provide information and influence on tourism expectations and perceptions. Within the tourism marketing context, destination perception is considered to be a major influential predictor in directing decision-making and consumer behaviors.

Destination attributes are commonly used in empirical research to measure tourists' expectations of a destination (Truong and King, 2009; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Žabka *et al.*, 2010). Of such empirical studies, the majority have examined the expectations of particular places, such as countries or cities. Destination attributes are the main factors formulated by researchers for the purpose of describing the various aspects of a country's image, which predominantly influences a person's expectation of that destination. This expectation cannot be easily altered or manipulated by any other aspect of the destination choice process (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

Although there are many attributes associated with a destination, the fast growth of cultural tourism has been at the forefront for some researchers, and the cultural attractions have become the most important attribute (Smith, 2003; Esu and Arrey, 2009) during the past decade. Due to an increase in the percentage of people who enjoy traveling, the tourism industry has become a massive market and can now be defined as a landscape industry, which is fully integrated into the destinations' environments (Formica, 2000; Martin, 2005).

Tourists' destination choices are often influenced by convenience. Thus, destinations in closer proximity to one's home would be more likely chosen over destinations offering similar products but located at a greater distance (Esu and Arrey, 2009). In addition, Dwyer and Kim (2003) state that local people's attitudes toward tourists are a major social factor in the formation of the macro-environment of a destination, which may influence tourists' satisfaction with their trip and is, therefore, vital to the success of the destination (Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003).

Lai and Vinh (2012) note that the services of a destination are the most important factor in tourists' destination choices. Thus, the prosperity of a destination's tourism is highly related to its provision of numerous ancillary services (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). The above analysis clearly indicates that price, culture, entertainment, relaxation, landscape, weather, accessibility, safety, local people's attitudes toward tourists, and service are commonly used as attractive attributes for a destination to attract tourists. However, each destination will be visited for its own unique set of destination attributes.

To execute a successful promotional strategy, it is important to understand the expectations of tourists by analyzing the effects that such expectations have on tourists' destination choices, consumption of goods and services and choosing to revisit. It is generally accepted that tourists have expectations after selecting a destination for a holiday and that their satisfaction levels during and after their holiday period are functions of their expectations (Truong and Foster, 2006).

Zahra (2012) indicates that the creation of an image in the consumer mind depends on the degree of familiarity obtained from all social and cultural sources and most importantly for destination marketing organizations the ability to understand consumer expectations and offer tourism products accordingly. In fact, this understanding of destination imagery and visitor perception is critical to a destination and provides the basis for more effective and efficient future strategic planning for the destination.

In practical terms, this implies that destination image studies are a prerequisite to a successful marketing strategy. A successful promotional strategy necessitates the understanding of when the image of the destination forms and at what point the image influences a consumer's choice of a particular destination (Sirakaya *et al.*, 2004).

A major objective of any destination positioning strategy should be to reinforce the positive images already held by the target audience, to correct any negative images, and to create a new image (Pike and Ryan, 2004). On the other hand, destination images influence tourists' decisions and behaviors towards the destination as well as their satisfaction levels and recollections of the experience through destination loyalty. Therefore, perceived images through promotional activity should be the basis of the evaluation or choice process and, thus, provide the link between motivations and destination choice (O'Leary & Deegan, 2003).

After reviewing 142 papers of destination image from 1973 to 2000, Pike (2004) found that the brand identity of a destination is the image recognition of a destination, and the brand image refers to how consumers perceive both the brand identity and brand positioning to enhance the resemblance between brand identity and image. However, there are gaps in the literature as well as a lack of examining the links among promotional activities, tourist expectations, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted at Maasai Mara National Reserve in Narok County. The research design used was descriptive survey and explanatory which enabled the researcher to gather data from the population. The target population was tourists visiting Maasai Mara National Reserve for the first six months of 2015. The simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 206 tourists. The respondents were randomly selected after considering factors such as accessibility and the significance of the study information to the researcher. Therefore, the target population provided the required sample size for the study. Questionnaires were used to collect the relevant quantitative data, with cronbach alpha being used to determine the reliability of the scales used. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, mean, and standard deviation and presented using tables and charts. The researcher also used inferential statistics (t-test) and employed a Pearson correlation to show the relationships that exist between the variables. Multiple regressions analysis was also performed to show the causal effect.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism Promotion Campaign and Tourist Destination Choice

The study was to ascertain the influence of tourism promotion campaigns on tourists' choice of Maasai Mara as a tourist destination. To achieve the objective the respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement on a five-point likert scale in the questionnaire. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Tourism promotion campaign at Maasai Mara National Reserve

		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I was able to view the images of the destination through promotion campaigns	Freq.	5	32	105	55	9	3.15	0.821
	%	2.4	15.5	51	26.7	4.4		
I was able to have personal interaction on tourist sites in Kenya through promotion campaigns	Freq.	1	25	98	61	21	3.37	0.844
	%	0.5	12.1	47.6	29.6	10.2		
I prefer promotion campaigns because they saw actual picture/reality on the tourism sites	Freq.	19	106	81	0	0	4.3	0.63
	%	9.2	51.5	39.3	0	0		
I get most of my destination information through promotional programs	Freq.	0	0	46	100	60	4.07	0.716
	%	0	0	22.3	48.5	29.1		
Tourism promotion campaigns							3.722	0.379

Source: Survey Data, 2017

In regards to whether the respondents were able to view the images of the destination through promotion campaigns, 4.4% (9) of the respondents strongly agreed, 26.7% (55) agreed, 15.5% (32) disagreed, 2.4% (5) strongly disagreed while 51% (105) were neutral. The results summed up to a mean of 3.15 and a standard deviation of 0.821 meaning that the majority of the tourists were unaware if images of the destination were displayed in a promotions campaign.

The study further enquired from the respondents whether they were able to have personal interaction on tourist sites in Kenya through promotion campaigns. The results revealed that 10.2% (21) of the respondents strongly agreed 29.6% (61) of them agreed, 12.1% (25) disagreed, 0.5% (1) strongly disagreed while 47.6% (98) of the respondents were neutral. The results summed up to a mean of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 0.844. On the whole, most (47.6%) of the respondents were not sure if the promotion campaigns made them have a personal interaction on tourist sites in Kenya. It could therefore be deduced that the tourists have not fully utilized

promotion campaigns or the promotion campaigns have not been effective in enhancing personal interaction on the tourism sites.

In order to ascertain whether the tourists prefer promotion campaigns because they saw actual picture/reality on the tourism sites, the results revealed that 9.2% (19) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 51.5% (106) disagreed while 39.3% (81) of them were undecided. This infers that the tourists had no preference for the promotion campaigns since they saw actual picture/reality on the tourism sites.

Further, respondents were also asked whether they get most of their destination information through promotional programs. The results showed that 29.1% (60) of the respondents strongly agreed, 48.5% (100) of the respondents agreed while 22.3% (46) of the respondents were neutral. The item realized a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.716. This is an indication that promotional programs are a source of information on the destination.

In general, results on the tourism promotion campaign summed up to a mean of 3.722 and a standard deviation of 0.379. This is an indication that the respondents were generally agreeable. Also, there were fewer variations in the responses as indicated by the standard deviation.

Tourist Destination Choice

Tourist destination choice as a result of using Destination Marketing Organizations was captured through three items namely: (1) it was easier for me to choose Maasai Mara; (2) am satisfied with the choice I made to come here, and (3) I intend to visit the national reserve again. Table 2 presents the customers' responses.

Table 2: Tourist destination choice as a result of TPCs at Maasai Mara National Reserve.

		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
It was easier for me to choose Maasai Mara	Freq.	1	1	55	79	70	4.05	0.819
	%	0.5	0.5	26.7	38.3	34		
Am satisfied with the choice I made to come here	Freq.	0	2	102	54	48	3.72	0.831
	%	0	1	49.5	26.2	23.3		
I intend to visit the national reserve again	Freq.	6	109	91			4.41	0.55
	%	2.9	52.9	44.2				
Tourist destination choice							4.0599	0.56662

Source: Survey Data, 2017

The study sought to find out if it was easier for the tourists to choose Maasai Mara. Results indicated that 34% (70) of the respondents strongly agreed, 38.3% (79) of them agreed, 0.5% (1) disagreed, 0.5% (1) strongly disagreed while 26.7% (55) of the respondents were neutral. The results summed up to a mean of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 0.819. This means that it was easier for the tourist to choose Maasai. This could be because there was sufficient information on the destination choice in destination marketing organization and that the tourism marketing campaigns were also effective in marketing the destination.

In a bid to establish whether the respondents were satisfied with the choice they made on visiting Maasai Mara, the respondents' were asked to respond accordingly. 23.3% (48) of the respondents strongly agreed, 26.2% (54) of them agreed, 1% (2) disagreed and 49.5% (102) of the respondents were neutral. The item realized a mean of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.831. The results imply that most (49.5%) of the respondents were satisfied with the choice of visiting Maasai Mara. It could be that their expectations of the destination choice were met.

In order to find out if the respondents intend to visit the national reserve again, the respondents were asked for their views on this and the results showed that the item realized a mean of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 0.55. This means that the tourists enjoy their visit to Maasai Mara and they intend to visit the national reserve again.

In general, the results on the destination choice summed up to a mean of 4.0599 and a standard deviation of 0.56662 indicating that the respondents were agreeable. The standard is less than 1 hence there were fewer variations in the responses.

The study exhibited a medium relationship between tourism promotion campaign and destination choice ($r = 0.342$, p -value $< .01$)

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}) stated that the tourism promotion campaign has no significant effect on the destination choice.

Findings showed that tourism promotion campaigns had coefficients of the estimate which was significant basing on $\beta_2 = 0.242$ (p -value = 0.000), hence the null hypothesis is rejected and concluded that tourism promotion campaigns have a significant effect on the destination choice. This implies that for each unit increase in the tourism promotion campaign, there is up to a 0.242 unit increase in the destination choice. Also, the effect of the tourism promotion campaign is shown by the t-test value of 4.511 which implies that the effect of the tourism promotion campaign surpasses that of the error.

Discussion

Tourism promotion campaigns were found to have a positive and significant influence on destination choice ($\beta_2 = 0.242$). In conformity with the results, Robin *et al.* (2002) observe that the marketing of tourism destinations achieves greater success by focusing on improving destination competitiveness. In a similar vein, Gomezlj and Mihalic (2008) echo that promotion campaigns are aimed at promoting the destination as a whole. Also, Truong and King (2009) demonstrate that promotional activities are very important for a destination to be successful in attracting more tourists. Consequently, Pike and Ryan (2004) elucidate that destination positioning strategy should aim at reinforcing the positive images already held by the target audience, to correct any negative images, and to create a new image. From the preceding results, it can be inferred that promotion campaigns have a pivotal role in destination choice among tourists.

Most findings revealed that web based technology has a positive and significant effect on destination choice ($\beta_3 = 0.436$). Consistently, Hawkins (2010) elucidated that banner ad in web pages is an important promotional tool since they connect travelers with thousands of websites of travel agencies, hotels, transportation companies among others. Also, Mothersbaugh & Best (2010) espoused that the presence of a web address in an advertisement enhances a variety of aspects of the firm's which include being customer-oriented, responsive, sophisticated, and successful. Furthermore, Jeng & Fesenmaier (2002) note that travelers make use of web based technology to collect and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision making process in order to reduce the risk of making poor destination choices. From the foregoing, it is evident that web based technologies are effective in relaying information on the destination. From such information, tourists can make the decision about whether to visit or not visit a particular destination.

Limitations and Further Directions.

Although this study has contributed to knowledge intended for this kind of research, some limitations are worth bringing to attention in regards to the research topic, method, theory and empirical data, with the aim of pointing out further research opportunities.

On a geographical dimension, this study was primarily limited to tourists visiting Maasai Mara national reserve, therefore generalize action might be a challenge. For this reason, further empirical investigations in different regions and countries are required. Additionally, further study needs to be conducted using more variables that may be relevant to this study.

Conclusion

The promotional programs are a source of information on the destination. However, the tourists have not fully utilized the tourism promotion campaigns. For instance, the tourists were unaware if images of the destination were displayed in the promotion campaigns. The destination images usually have an influence on visitors' decisions and behavior towards the destination together with their satisfaction level. As such, mobilizing tourism promotion campaigns is of the essence. There is therefore a gap in terms of effectively utilizing the tourism promotion campaigns to induce potential tourists to visit given destinations.

Recommendation

Marketing strategies need to develop an image that will position their destination in the marketplace as an attractive site for vacation, recreation or even business. This can be achieved by tourism promotional campaigns. In tourism promotion campaigns, the focus needs to be on understanding the consumers' expectations and ensuring that their expectations are met once they visit their preferred destination. Most importantly, tourism promotion campaigns need to enhance personal interaction on tourism sites.

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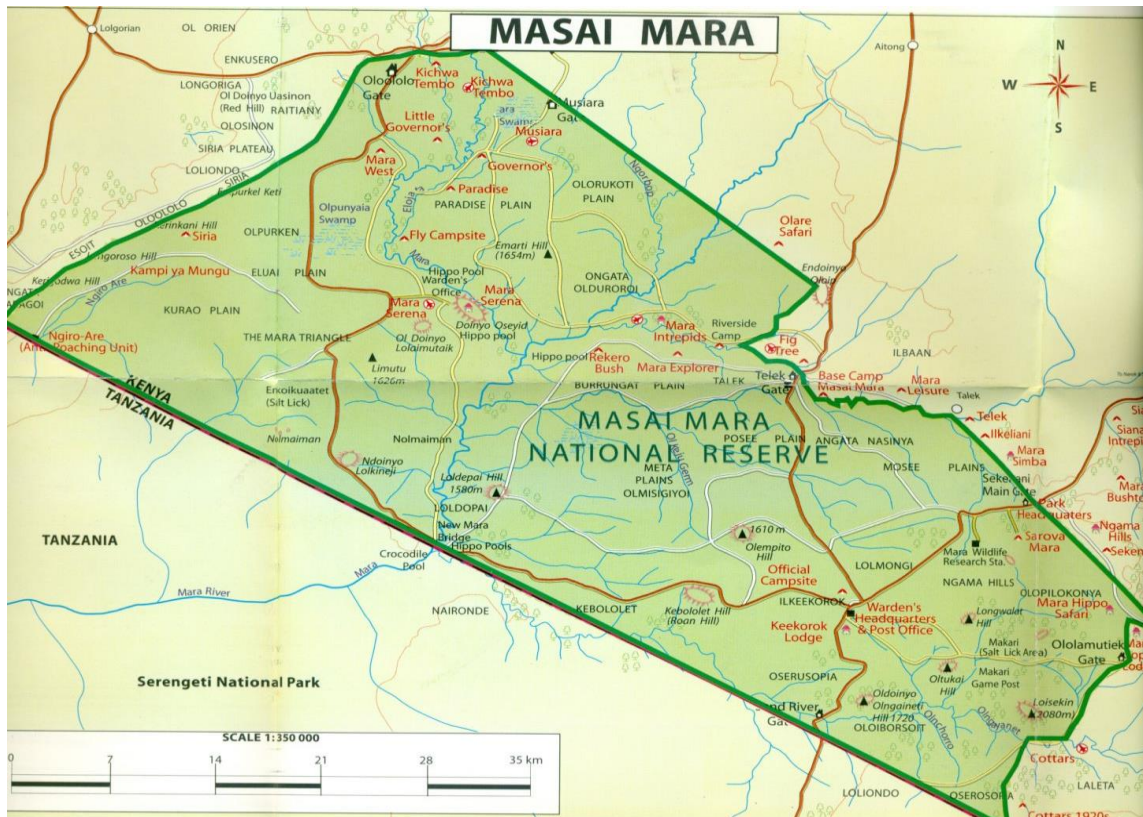
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Appendix

Plate 1: Map of Study Location (Maasai Mara National Reserve)



Source; Google maps (2017)