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Improving the Tourists' Destination Choice through Destination Marketing Organizations in Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya.

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Abstract: *The study investigated the effects of destination marketing organizations 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 crobanch 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 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 destination marketing organizations (β_1= 0.317) with a p-value = 0.000 had a significant and positive effect on tourist destination choice. This infers that the use of destination marketing organizations enhances the destination choice. The study will be of great value because it will help the management of Maasai Mara National reserve to improve their destinations by the use of an appropriate Destination Marketing Organizations, 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 enlighten on various tourists' destination choice by use of an appropriate Destination Marketing Organizations. 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 Maasai Mara National Reserve to put more emphasis on tourists' destination choice 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: *Destination Marketing Organization, Tourists' destination choice, Customer satisfaction, Marketing strategies.*

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I. Introduction

The global choice of destination according to Henderson (2007) is growing and certain of these destinations have similar characteristics. This gives rise to a situation where one can be replaced by another as the notion of destination choice set implies. Destination is commonly referred to as place in tourism parlance. Tourist destination choice has been defined as a transformation of motivation in purchasing action (Buhalis, 2000). The destination choice is made by alternative evaluation based on individual preferences and goals, while 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 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 (Eliat, 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 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 (Ghen and Gursoy, 2001).

II. Destination Marketing Organizations and Tourist Destination Choice.

A destination marketing organizations is charged with the task of convincingly appealing to potential visitors and so attracting them to their destination. Destination image plays a central role in this process and the effect of destination image on destination choice decisions has been well established in the tourism literature (Tapachai & Waryzcak, 2000). It is also known that visitors generally do not constitute one homogenous group. Another key challenge of a destination marketing organization, consequently, is to identify sub-markets of visitors.

The uncovering of separate target markets, captured by the concept of market segmentation, is well recognized by practitioners and researchers in the fields of marketing, and in applications related to tourist destination choices (Dolnicar, 2004). Tourism marketing and promotion organizations are established for the specific purpose of marketing destinations. In most cases they are governmental or nonprofit private organizations which bring together local political, civic, business, and visitor industry representatives with the knowledge, skills and leadership abilities. The National Tourism Administration (NTA), National Tourism Office (NTO), other governmental bodies at different political or administrative levels, and other public/private organizations are responsible for developing an image that will position their destination in the marketplace as an attractive site for vacation, recreation, and business. They must coordinate these different elements, in order to attain a desired single image, to be presented to the prospective visitors (Barret, 2007).

Tourism organizations usually work within a political structure. It is important that the organization develop a leadership role within the community in order to be effective in the coordination and execution of its programs. Tourism organizations should be visible entities within a destination, drawing attention to what they are doing so that the community understands the significance of the visitor industry (Kenneth, 2002).

Tourism organizations have other important responsibilities including working with meeting and group planners and providing key resources, information. The tourism organization can provide vital contact names and local information, locate necessary facilities, and act as a convention management consultant to planners. The tourism organization also recommends reliable sources for services and supplies, information on facilities and prices, assist planners with the securing of meeting rooms and hotel room commitments, and serves as the broker or liaison between the planner and the host destination and its resources (Cravens, 2000).

Tourism organizations also help visitors to their destinations through information centers and by responding to visitor inquiries. Tourism organizations can provide visitors with an array of information regarding hotels, restaurants, attractions, shopping, recreation, and entertainment opportunities, and essentially serves as a visitor's one-stop shopping center for ideas and information (Gillan, 2003).

III. 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 crobanch 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 Pearson correlation to show the relationships that exist between the variables. Multiple regressions analysis was also performed to show the causal effect.

IV. Results and Discussion

Destination Marketing Organizations and Tourist Destination Choice

The study was to establish the contribution of destination marketing organizations on tourists' choice of Maasai Mara as a tourist destination. To achieve this objective, the respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement on the contributions of destination marketing organizations on tourists' choice. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Destination Marketing Organizations at Maasai Mara National Reserve

		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I get most of my destination information from destination marketing organizations	Freq.	5	2	10	91	98	4.33	0.82
	%	2.4	1	4.9	44.2	47.6		
I find it easy to access information	Freq.	1	15	61	75	54	3.81	0.927
	%	0.5	7.3	29.6	36.4	26.2		
I prefer destination marketing organizations due to their high familiarity with new technology	Freq.	5	1	85	77	38	3.69	0.861
	%	2.4	0.5	41.3	37.4	18.4		
Staff in destination marketing organizations are very supportive and helpful	Freq.	12	6	49	71	68	3.86	1.093
	%	5.8	2.9	23.8	34.5	33		
I can access online manual room destination marketing organizations	Freq.	1	8	72	59	66	3.88	0.926
	%	0.5	3.9	35	28.6	32		
Destination marketing organizations							3.9136	0.59699

Source: Survey Data, 2017

The respondents were asked whether they get most of their destination information from destination marketing organizations. The results from the study revealed that, of the total respondents, 47.6% (98) strongly agreed that they get most of their information from destination marketing organizations, 44.2% (91) of them agreed, 1% (2) disagreed, 2.4% (5) strongly disagreed while 4.9% (10) of the respondents were neutral. The mean value was 4.33 and the standard deviation was 0.82. The mean value indicates that majority of the respondents were in agreement that destination marketing organizations are their main source of destination choice. On the other hand, the standard deviation shows less variation in the responses.

In determining whether the tourists find it easy to access information, the study revealed that; 26.2% (54) of the respondents strongly agreed, 36.4% (75) of them agreed, 7.3% (15) disagreed, 0.5% (1) strongly disagreed while 29.6% (61) of the respondents were undecided. The results summed up to a mean of 3.81 and standard deviation of 0.927. On the whole, most of the tourists find it easy to access information. It can therefore be inferred that destination marketing organizations have made it easier for tourists to have easy access to information about their destination choice.

In a related question of whether the tourists prefer destination marketing organizations due to their high familiarity with new technology, results from the study revealed that, the question had a mean of 3.69 and standard deviation of 0.861. The mean value indicates that majority of the respondents were in agreement that tourists prefer destination marketing organizations due to their high familiarity with new technology and the standard deviation shows less variations in the responses. This was as a result of 18.4% (38) of the respondents strongly agreeing, 37.4% (77) agreeing, 0.5% (1) disagreeing, 2.4% (5) strongly disagreeing and 41.3% (85) being uncertain.

In order to find out whether, the staff in destination marketing organizations are very supportive and helpful; respondents were asked to state the degree to which they concurred with the above. Of the total respondents, 33% (68) of the respondents strongly agreed, 34.5% (71) of them agreed, 2.9% (6) disagreed, 5.8% (12) strongly disagreed while 23.8% (49) of them were neutral. The results summed up to a mean of 3.86 and standard deviation of 1.093 meaning that majority of the respondents were in agreement that the staff in destination marketing organizations are very supportive and helpful.

In relation to whether the tourists could access online manual room destination marketing organizations, the results were positive with 32% (66) of the respondents in strong agreement, 28.6% (59) in agreement, 3.9% (8) disagreement, 0.5% (1) strong disagreement while 35% (72) of them were neutral. The item realized a mean of 3.88 and standard deviation of 0.926.

Generally, the results on destination marketing organizations revealed a mean of 3.9136 and standard deviation of 0.59699 which implies that on average the respondents were in agreement. There also less 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 DMOs 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 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 of 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 less variations in the responses.

The study exhibited a medium relationship between destination marketing organizations and destination choice ($r = -0.458$, p-value $< .01$).

V. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H_{o1}) stated that destination marketing organizations have no significant effect on the destination choice.

Research findings revealed that destination marketing organizations had a significant effect on the destination choice basing on $\beta_1 = 0.317$(p-value = 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. These results suggest that destination marketing organizations make it easier for tourists to access information on their destination choice. As such, for every unit increase in destination marketing organizations, there is also an increase in the destination choice by the same unit. Furthermore, the effect of destination marketing organizations was stated by the t-test value = 5.698 which point out that the effect of destination marketing organization is over 5 times that of the error associated with it.

VI. Discussion

Findings showed that destination marketing organizations had significant and positive effect on destination choice (β_1 = 0.317). The findings are consistent with Tapachai & Waryzcak (2000) posit that destination marketing organizations are effective in convincingly appealing to potential visitors through the use of destination image which plays a role in destination choice decisions. Also, in line with the results, Barret (2007) espoused that it is of essence for destination marketing organizations to coordinate the different elements of the destination in the market place in order to attain a desired single image that will be presented to prospective visitors. This will turn induce the prospective visitors to visit the said destinations. Further support to the study findings is by Gillan (2003) who notes that tourism organizations provide visitors with an array of information regarding hotels, restaurants, attractions, shopping and recreation. As such, they serve as the visitors' one-stop shopping center for ideas and information thus inducing visitors to visit a given destination. From the foregoing prior studies, it is evident that the study conforms to earlier literature hence it adds sufficient knowledge to the existing body of literature.

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 an 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, a further study needs to be conducted using more variables that may be relevant to this study.

VII. Conclusion

Findings provided enough evidence that marketing strategies are more important as a direct factor of influence on destination choice. Essentially, destination marketing organizations have made it easier for visitors to have access to information about the destination of their choice. Tourists have a preference towards it since they are familiar with new technology. In fact, it is possible for tourists to access online manual room destination marketing organizations.

Recommendation

Marketing strategies needs 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 Destination Marketing Organization making it easier for potential visitors to access information. There is also need for a supportive and helpful staff that will respond to the visitors' inquiries promptly. Additionally, it should be possible for tourists to access online manual room destination marketing organizations. With the above in place, destination marketing organizations will be able to appeal to visitors.

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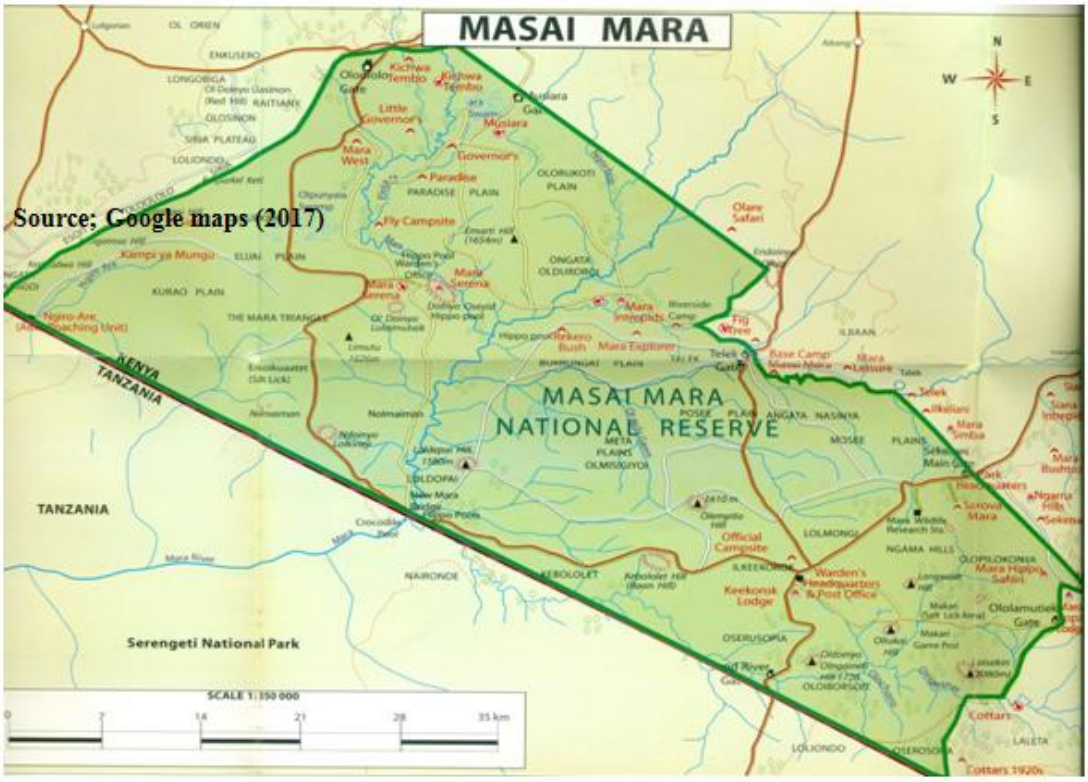
Appendix

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



Source; Google maps (2017)

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