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Strategic Determinants of Destination Competitiveness: A Case of Western Tourist Circuit, Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya's Western Tourist Circuit is often referred to as the country's 'best-kept secret'. However, the circuit is one of the least competitive as most tourists prefer coastal beaches and game parks. The purpose of this paper was to establish the strategic determinants of tourism destination competitiveness in Kenya's Western Tourist Circuit. The study was grounded on and guided by the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model of destination competitiveness. The objectives of the study were: to examine the effect of destination attractors on destination competitiveness and to establish the effect of support resources on destination competitiveness. Explanatory research design was adopted. Convenience sampling technique was used to arrive at a sample of 102 tourists. Destination attractors were found to positively and significantly affect destination competitiveness whereas support resources had a negative though insignificant effect on destination competitiveness.

Keywords: Destination Competitiveness, Destination Attractors, Support Resources, Tourism Circuit

1. Introduction

Competitiveness is a broad concept which can be observed through different perspectives namely: products, companies, branches of the economy or national economies, in the short run or the long run. From a macro perspective, competitiveness is a national concern and the ultimate goal is to improve the real income of the community. From a micro perspective, it is seen as a firm-level phenomenon. In order to be competitive, any organization must provide products and services, which satisfy the never-ending desires of the modern consumer (Omerzel, 2008). In the past tourism destinations believed that it was enough to have only the tourists, destination resources, low salaries and attractive exchange rates for them to compete and be successful in the international tourism industry (Bordas 1994). This approach gave rise to the formulation and implementation of strategies and policies that aimed mainly at stimulating tourist volumes. In most cases, the results were not as expected leading to questioning of this strategy.

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Empirical studies on factors determining destination competitiveness continue to differ from author to author and consequently from destination to destination, implying that competitive factors regarding destinations can never be the same for all destinations (Phakdisoth & Kim, 2007; Enright & Newton, 2005). For instance, a study on competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international conference destination in South-East Asia, (Qu *et al.,* 2000) concluded that accommodation, conventional facilities, accessibility, safety, and infrastructure system were perceived as important tourist choice. Kim and Kim (2003) in their analysis of Seoul as an international convention destination pointed out service quality, transportation, meeting room facilities and destination attractiveness as major attributes for choosing a destination. Poon, (1993) revealed long-term profits and continued patronage as being essential in attaining competitive advantages. According to Wang, Hsu, and Swanson (2012), China's tourism competitiveness relies on five underlying dimensions: destination management, tourism resources, tourism superstructure, infrastructure, and destination-supporting factors.

Melville & Annari (2015) pointed out political and economic stability, economic climate, marketing, quality and variety of food as being the most important components contributing to competitiveness of South Africa as a tourism destination. As stated by the policy and practice for global tourism by UNWTO (2011), factors shaping destination competitiveness include investment, productivity, macro-economic policy, branding, image, price, market share, visitor satisfaction, safety, quality of experiences, innovation, strategy and training of human resources.

The global market place is becoming increasingly competitive posing a challenge to the tourism industry as with other industries. This has resulted in intense competition between destinations to grow their market share (Navickas and Malakauskaite, 2009; Blanke and Chiesa, 2013; Pearce and Schänzel, 2013). In 2012, Africa attracted only 5% of the international overnight visitors, accounting for 52 million international tourists. This smaller share in global tourism distribution amongst the African countries was attributable to the intense competition amongst global tourist destinations (Blanke and Chiesa, 2013).

Ndivo, Waudo, and Waswa (2012) sought to examine the popularity of both the individual attractions on the basis of frequency of distribution and return visitation. Nairobi National Park was the most frequented tourist attraction with 75% followed by Mombasa Island with a visitation rate of 68.6%. Kakamega Tropical Rain Forest had a visitation rate of 19% while Kisumu Impala sanctuary had 13% visitation rate. The 2015 KNBS report, revealed low visitation rates of 3.39% to 4.77% from 2010-2014 in Western tourist circuit.

1.1 Review of Western Tourist Circuit
Western Tourist Circuit is often referred to as the country's 'best-kept secret' because of the presence of natural and cultural attractions that have not been exploited for development of various forms of sustainable tourism. The circuit is home to historical and archaeological sites such as Thim-lich Ohinga; caves, freshwater bodies including Lake Victoria; inland beaches, tropical rain forest, indigenous forest ecosystems, wetland ecosystems, hills and mountains, islands, waterfalls, national parks and game reserves, nature conservancies, museums, and diverse cultures. In spite of the abundance of treasures, the destination is one of the least

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competitive in tourism as most tourists to Kenya prefer coastal beaches and selected protected areas (Nyamweno *et. al.,* 2016).

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were two-fold:

(i) To examine the effect of destination attractors on destination competitiveness of the Western Tourist Circuit in Kenya.

(ii) To establish the effect of support resources on destination competitiveness of Western Tourist Circuit in Kenya.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Crouch and Ritchie (2003) model of destination competitiveness. This model considers the competitiveness of a country as a function of four major determinants: factor conditions; demand conditions; related and supporting industries; and, firm strategy, structure, and rivalry. Further, Crouch and Ritchie model conceptualizes destination competitiveness as a function of core resources and attractors, supporting factors and resources, destination management and qualifying determinants. The model points out the importance of global macro environment and competitive microenvironment surrounding the destinations. The model is ideal for this research paper as it helps in understanding of the complex, fragmented and interrelated nature of the tourism industry and the factors influencing a destination's competitiveness or otherwise.

4. Review of Relevant Literature

A study by Vengesayi (2017) on conceptual model of tourism destination competitiveness and attractiveness suggests that popularity of tourism destinations can be enhanced by a combination of the factors of competitiveness and attractiveness. He further posits that the more a destination reflects the feelings and opinions of its visitors the more it is perceived to be attractive and likely to be chosen. A further study by Falk and Hagsten (2018) on the art of attracting international conferences to European cities revealed that cultural offerings are one of the attractors. Moreover, cities with cultural attractions and historical heritages are more attractive for both conference locations and tourists in general (Cellini, 2011; Ribaudo & Figini, 2017; Su & Lin, 2014; Yang *et al.,* 2010). Cuccia *et al.* (2016) also revealed that the natural and cultural endowment positively affects the efficiency score of the Italian regions.

Omerzel (2006) identified inherited, created and support resources as providing various characteristics of a destination that make it attractive to visit. He further classified inherited resources as natural and cultural. He saw supporting factors and resources (general infrastructure, quality of services, hospitality, and accessibility of destination) as providing the foundation for a successful tourism industry. Dwyer *et al.* (2014) observe that inherited natural and sociocultural bases are important competitive advantages for Slovenian tourism. Results of a study by Chin *et al.* (2014) on rural tourism destination competitiveness revealed that cultural heritage and natural resources are important indicators determining destination competitiveness. Omerzel and Mihalič (2008) found out that tourism managers grade the

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competitiveness of natural and cultural attractions higher than created resources and management.

Dwyer and Forsyth (2011) posit that in order to achieve competitive advantage, a tourist destination must ensure that its overall attractiveness in terms of natural or scenic beauty, culture, and tourist experience, is superior to that in the many alternative destinations available. Maharaj and Balkaran (2014) also found out that, countries that offer travelers access to natural assets have a competitive advantage. Ramkissoon, Uysal, and Brown (2011) analyzed the structural relationship between destination image and cultural behavior intentions using the structural equation modeling. Results showed that destination image is a salient factor influencing the cultural behavioral intentions of tourists. The research also attempted to investigate which dimensions of image had the highest influence on behavioral intentions and found out that cultural attributes exerted the highest influence on tourists' behavioral intentions.

An interview by Broadbent and Broadbent (2013) pointed out Ethiopia's culture and nature as the greatest assets for its destination competitiveness and among the most important cultural destination in the African continent like Egypt and Morocco with very diverse options of cultural experiences. Pietsch and Ringbeck (2013) in their study pointed out the importance of cultural resources as it enhanced a country's competitiveness. Kayar and Kozak (2010) evaluated thirteen key factors that affect destination competitiveness and compared the competitiveness levels of EU countries with those of Turkey. They also focused on detecting the more or less effective determinants of destination competitiveness. Twenty-eight countries were clustered according to their competitiveness scores. Cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling techniques were employed for an analysis of the findings. From the results, the factors which most affects the competitiveness of these countries are air transport infrastructure, natural and cultural resources, ground transport infrastructure, and health and hygiene.

According to Melian-Gonzalez and Garcia-Falcon (2003), destination resources are assets that a destination possesses. They are the strategic assets which determine the level of activity a destination can achieve. They further assert that they are the core resources on which tourism at a destination is based. Mo, Howard, and Havitz (1993) however held a different opinion. They maintained that destination service infrastructure is, after destination environment, the most important determinant in a tourist's experience. Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009) emphasized the need for tourist well-being of individual tourists and need to regard destination attractiveness as one of the key determinants of TDC. Zhang and Gu (2011) established a quantified model of four determinants for comprehensive assessments of TDC, namely tourism resources endowment, tourism reception capacity, tourism industrial strength, and tourism supportability. It is therefore important to note that attractiveness of a destination constitutes the primary motivations for a foundation upon which a successful tourism industry can be established.

According to Yoon *et. al.* (2001), attractions and resources have been considered the major determinants or factors in tourism destinations' competitiveness, from a tourism perspective. Findings by Chen, Chen, and Lee (2011) revealed that destination attractions form a major

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resource for tourism development in Kinmen. In redefining destination promotion based on new paradigms in city tourism management, Krass pointed out new paradigms of successful destination management as being, cultural heritage tourism, visitor perception and urban quality of life. According to the author urban tourism is also a strategy for building quality services and products and sustainable management of the urban community, a means of attracting responsible tourists, and a way of developing competitive city destinations that combine a comparative supply able to meet the visitor's expectations with a positive contribution to the development of cities and the well-being of their residents.

The concept of support resources on destination service quality and customer satisfaction have been vital concepts in the disciplines of recreation and tourism as well as in marketing. They have been used as indicators of profitability for successful achievement of organizational objectives. Majority of the studies have paid attention to the uniqueness of the concepts, the ways, and means to measure them, and their interrelationship vis-à-vis their influence on outcomes (Lee, 2014). Tasci and Knutson (2004) however subscribe to a different line of thought. They hold that regardless of the type of tourism management tool used, the authentic qualities of the destination and community need to be preserved to keep the local identity of the destination. According to Claudio and Constanza (2017), a destination must have an appropriate level of development in terms of services and destination offer (connectivity, infrastructure, attractions, excursions, hotels, restaurants, etc.). Without these services, the destination cannot compete against other similar alternative tourist destinations.

Infrastructure, on the other hand, is a critical component of a sustainable and competitive tourism sector which is not only essential for destinations in maintaining and expanding capacity, but also allows for, and encourages improvements in quality, competitiveness, and productivity (Cockerell & Goodger, 2011). In Kenya, the travel and tourism sector has been one of the key economic drivers generating over 10% of the country's GDP and total formal employment. However, lack of infrastructural capacity for the tourism sector coupled with limited investment capital was and has been recognized as the main drawbacks to achieving the country's goals for the sector (Republic of Kenya, 2008). Egypt's tourism sector has historically played a central role in the economy, with its total contribution to GDP rising from 8.5% in 1988 to 17.5% in 2010 (WTTC, 2011). It being one of the best tourist destinations of the Middle East region and Arab countries particularly, are destinations of choice for tourists from around the world. The county's attractions are diverse, ranging from unique archeological sites to sandy beaches and cultural festivals, to desert trekking. The well-developed tourism infrastructure such as sizable bed capacity and direct international connections has also helped Egypt's tourism sector attract an increasing diverse range of visitors from Europe, Asia and the Middle East regions (Nasr, 2016).

Ahmed, Azam, and Bose (2010) examined different preferences of the tourist and their tour intention in selecting different tour destination. The study utilized both exploratory and empirical research design. The study examined nine factors related to different facets of tourism such as quality of service, natural beauty of a destination, known destination, convenient accommodation, adventure, security, effective and efficient transportation, safe and

quality food and shopping malls. Quality issue was found to be substantial because it dealt with the tourists' perception on the pleasure. Destinations have become increasingly reliant on the delivery of quality products and services. Campos-Soria *et al.* (2005) notes that service quality not only has a positive and direct effect on competitiveness but also an indirect one on competitiveness via other variables such as occupancy rates. McCabe *et al.* (2012) somehow shared the same opinion that tourism stakeholders must appreciate the changing role of technology and be willing and ready to embrace it.

According to Iunius *et al*. (2015), several challenges regarding European tourism industry have been identified with experts trying to formulate several policies within the newest Tourism Action Framework: stimulate long-term competitiveness in the European tourism sector, promote the development of sustainable and high-quality tourism and consolidate the image and promotion of European Tourist destination. As a result, ICT has become a keyword within the European policy. According to the authors, decision-makers in European destinations should focus on identifying innovative ways to implement the new Tourism Action Framework adopted by the European Commission, through ICT applications, in order to support long-term competitiveness achievement. According to Croes (2011), competitiveness is related to the ability of the destination to create and nurture a high-quality product. Likewise, tourism requires sophisticated planning and technological inputs to extract premium prices. It requires a consistent consideration for the tastes and preferences of tourists and the manipulation of service approaches and strategies to adjust to those tastes and preferences, which then enables destinations to continue to be successful in the marketplace.

Dwyer and Forsyth (2010), illustrate that information technology and communication systems are part of the infrastructure that enhances tourism in any region. Further, the two scholars point out that, tourists in the contemporary society want to connect with their relatives once they reach the destination. This means that access to internet and mobile telephony must be guaranteed in the region. The researchers further explain that, demand and supply based on tourism, as a product cannot be of success when information technology infrastructure is not provided. Technological forces pave way for major opportunities and threats that must be considered during formulation of strategies. According to Wang, Hsu, and Swanson (2012), the foundation for building a successful tourism destination, such as a destination's infrastructure, facilitating resources, enterprise, and accessibility, makes up the supporting factors and resources component. Tőzsér (2010) found out that infrastructure is among the key factors determining attractiveness of a tourist destination. Once at a destination, tourists need also to be able to gain easy access to tourist sites and resources.

Daracha (2013) in his study suggested that focus should be placed on alternative means of transport through direct policies or subsidies. Dominguez *et al*. (2015) sought to address the research question of what factors make destination competitive in Australia and Spain. Findings showed that competitive factors are different indeterminacy, importance and are country-dependent. For Spain, climate, locale, and tourist structure are the most important whereas, quality of services, brand, and infrastructure were of great importance for Australia. Azzopardi and Nash (2015) in their study on a framework for island destination competitiveness – perspectives from the island of Malta found out that public infrastructure

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supports tourism competitiveness in direct and indirect ways. Respondents stated that the efficiency, costs, speed, and quality of goods and services produced and delivered by industries that support tourism rely on the availability, reliability, safety, and efficiency of general infrastructural services.

Loureiro and Ferreira (2015) pointed out the need for tourism industry to build basic urban infrastructure for access and provide a legal superstructure. They also pointed out the need for state to control the quality of the tourist product, institutional promotion of destinations, treatment and distribution of tourism information and deployment and maintenance of basic urban infrastructure. Zhou *et al.* (2015) applied a hybrid analytical hierarchy process (AHP) to evaluate West Virginia's resource-based tourism competitiveness in relation to its neighboring states. Findings revealed that West Virginia performed well in adventure-based and nature-based activities but had a competitive edge on hospitality and friendliness of residents. However, West Virginia was seen to be less competitive on variety and quality of restaurants.

According to Portolan (2012), Croatia private accommodation capacities are a growing segment of the lodging industry. In the year 2010 for instance, 2,684 million tourists were registered with 19.4 million overnight stays. This is an indication that private accommodation as a secondary type of accommodation cannot be neglected as the amount of expenditures realized in private accommodation is big. Jani and Minde (2016) assessed destination competitiveness of East African countries specifically Tanzania and Uganda and revealed that accommodation and visitor services were highly competitive in Uganda while transport system and travel motivation were highly competitive in Tanzania. This is an indication that both accommodation and transport system play a determinant role in destination competitiveness.

5. Methodology

The study employed explanatory research design. Convenience sampling was used to select 102 tourists drawn from Thim-Lich Ohinga, Kakamega Tropical Rain Forest Reserve, Ruma National Park, and Impala Sanctuary to gather information which covered a wide range of topics related to the thematic areas of the study. Content validity was achieved by ensuring questions cover all the research objectives, with experts' advice being sought to also improve the content of the research instrument. Construct validity was also achieved by associating the current study with empirical studies and theories on destination competitiveness (Kothari, 2004). Reliability of the instrument was determined by Cronbach coefficient alpha of more than 0.7, from which results ranged from 0.746 to 0.871. Eviews was used as a tool to aid analysis. Inferential analysis using multiple regression analysis was used to deduce a model that explained the strategic determinants of tourism destination competitiveness. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables. As indicated by the Jacque Bera Statistic, all the variables were not normally distributed and therefore, a GLM regression model was used because of its usefulness in relaxing the classical regression assumptions (McCullagh & Nelder, 1982).

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	JB (Prob.)
Destination Competitiveness	102	3.892	1.107	10.898 (0.004)
Destination Attractors	102	4.194	0.486	14.423 (0.001)
Support Resources	102	4.195	0.523	24.200 (0.000)

6. Results and Discussion

Z-statistic was used to determine whether to or not to reject the null hypothesis while the Likelihood ratio test (LR test) was used to test for the existence of a regression relationships between the variables. As indicated in table (II), LR statistic was significant at 8.066; p-value=0.045<0.05 an indication that there was a regression relationship between the variables.

Destination attractors (β=0.812, p-value=0.011<0.05) had a significant positive effect on destination competitiveness. This implies that attractiveness of a destination constitutes the primary motivation for a tourist to elect to visit a destination. The results concur with findings by Ritchie and Crouch (2010), that resources and attractions form part of competitive factors determining the success of tourist destinations. Omerzel (2006) was also in agreement that destination attractors play an important role in determining tourism destination competitiveness.

Support resources had an insignificant negative effect on destination competitiveness (β= -0.443, p-value =0.087>0.05). As such, support resources do not affect destination competitiveness in western tourist circuit. Wang *et. al.* (2012) held a contrary opinion, that supporting factors and resources component forms the basic foundation for building a successful tourist destination, such as a destination's infrastructure, facilitating resources, enterprise, and accessibility. Additionally, Claudio and Constanza (2017), argued that a destination must have an appropriate level of development in terms of services and destination offer.

Table 2: Regression Model II

Dependent Variable: Destination Competitiveness
Method: Generalized Linear Model (Quadratic Hill Climbing)

Variable	Coefficient	z-Statistic	Prob.
Destination Attractors	0.812	2.550	0.011
Support Resources	-0.443	-1.711	0.087
Constant	4.589	4.423	0.000
Mean dependent variable 3.892	S.D. dependent variable	1.107	
Deviance statistic 1.167	Restr. Deviance	123.814	
LR statistic 8.066	Prob. (LR statistic)	0.045	

7. Conclusions

From the findings, it is evident that destination attractors influence competitiveness of the Western Tourist Circuit in Kenya and not support resources. However, there is need for continuous and responsible destination management in order to achieve and maintain an

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appropriate level of competitiveness. Since achieving a good performance and position in the tourism market does not only depend on capability of a destination to attract tourists, it also requires adequate management of destination attractors and support resources in order to provide the basis for differentiation.

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