

KENYA'S DESTINATION IMAGE: PERCEPTIONS OF KENYA AS A PREMIER DESTINATION OF AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper was to investigate the perceptions of Kenya as a premier destination in Africa by potential visitors from the United Kingdom source market. The article specifically looked at the perceptions before actual visitation by the prospective visitors. United Kingdom has over the years been one of the key source markets for tourists for Kenya. An understanding of the perceptions held by potential tourists is an important tool for marketers to re-brand Kenya and give it a new image that will among other things ensure continued growth of the industry. There is dearth of research in destination image on UK perspective on Kenya as a tourist destination. It is expected that the results of the study will lead to better strategies for tourism growth in the wake of global competition in the industry. The study was cross-sectional survey carried out in selected locations of the city of Glasgow in Scotland among prospective visitors to Kenya where face to face random sampling was used. Data was collected using a self administered questionnaire and analysed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. The results indicate that the perceptions of Kenya as a premier destination of Africa are positive. The research was only limited in the city of Glasgow in Scotland thereby representing a fraction of the entire source market. A large sample would have been appropriate from several cities in Europe. The fact that Kenya bears a positive image as a premiere tourist destination in Africa despite the many calamities and destination issues that have affected it such as terrorism, political violence and others, it is imperative for the government and other key players to put good competitive strategies in place in order to not only increase the tourist arrivals from diverse markets but also to increase tourism revenues.

Key Words: *image, perceptions, premier destination*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the world economy and widely recognized for its contribution to regional and national economic development. It is not only a growing source of foreign exchange, alleviation of balance of payment problems, and creator of employment but also contributes significantly towards the increase of income, savings, investment and economic growth. The tourist product is a set of experiences identified with a

destination and marketed through images of that place and hence the link between a tourist and a destination is what makes image an invaluable element in marketing (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999).

The tourism product is unique from other products such as manufactured ones due to its characteristics of perishability, inseparability and intangibility. Consumption and production occur simultaneously since the service cannot be stored and due to intangibility, the products cannot be sampled in advance. This therefore makes the tourist image of the product a fundamental component of the decision-making process. One of the most significant challenges arising from the increasing competitive global tourism environment is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy (Middleton, 1994).

It is clear that marketing decisions and strategic planning of tourism provisions require knowledge of factors affecting destination choice and type of trips and forecasts of tourism flows in the short and long term and image is one such factor that has an influence on destination choice. The term image and perceptions are used interchangeably in this paper.

Image is the overall perception or total set of impression of a place and exercises some influence over tourist behaviour. Potential tourists lack enough knowledge about a destination not visited and this is mainly confined to symbolic information acquired either from sources like media or from their social groups. While the importance of a destination's attractions and amenities cannot be underestimated, research shows that the image of a destination is of equal importance. It has been found that prospective tourists are not only influenced by a destination's potential for performance but also by their perceptions of the particular destination (Kim, 1998). The image of a destination is therefore one of the main factors that prospective visitors take into account when choosing a holiday.

The influence of destination image is considered by various authors in decision models and it is therefore thought that the destination with strong positive images will have a higher probability of being included and chosen in the process of decision making. Tourists behaviour is expected to be partly conditioned by the image that they have of destinations (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999; Middleton, 1994; Kim, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

It has been a challenge for destinations to market themselves as a unified tourist product especially due to many factors that affect the image of a destination (Von Friedrichs Gra"ngsjo", 2003). In developing countries like Kenya for example, the perceptions of destination image are affected by many factors such as terrorism, political instabilities and civil unrests, disease outbreaks and other factors as well that seem to affect its growth. This is worsened by the fact that these negative images are relayed to the world immediately through various channels notably television, internet, social media and newspapers and the word of mouth. Further, as noted by Echnner (2002), 'the image problem of Third World countries is seen to relate to the images and stereotypes that are created from a First World perspective, and which influence the marketing of these countries as tourism destinations'. In 1998, there was a terrorist attack in Kenya at the American Embassy, other terrorism related attacks include Kikambala and the Westgate mall in Nairobi that resulted in massive cancellation of travel. The 2007/2008 election chaos further contributed to Kenya's negative image that was worsened by travel advisories by the western governments. Similar examples in the rest

Africa seem to contribute to the negative destination image of Africa. These negative perceptions of destinations lead to poor performance in the industry. For example, in Kenya, Tourism earnings, which are a key source of foreign exchange earnings, decreased by 1.9 per cent from KSh 97.9 billion in 2011 to KSh 96.0 billion in 2012. International visitor arrivals decreased by 6.1 per cent from 1.8 million in 2011 to 1.7 million in 2012. According to the economic survey of Kenya of 2013, Performance of the sector was mainly affected by a slowdown in the global economy especially in the Euro zone coupled with travel advisories following security concerns (Government of Kenya, 2013)

Studies by other authors such as Bonn, Joseph and Dai (2005) have looked at the perceptions from the country of origin or generating market as a key consideration in the determination of the positioning strategy of a destination. Basing on their study of perceptions of domestic and international visitors visiting Florida State in US, it was found that international visitors placed significant perceptions on service image expectations and environmental factors. Their conclusion was that it is imperative for destination managers to have an understanding of how the perceptions of a tourism product and service quality components are perceived across different target markets in order to gain insight into possible competitive advantages. Several researchers have further suggested that motivation can also have on the influence the image formation process (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Chen and Hsu, 2000).

As many of these developing nations are generally affected by political unrest and other development issues, which are conveyed by the media and other sources, it is of the utmost importance to determine whether these perceptions have an effect on the image of these tourism destinations, which is the focus of this study. This study is even significant for Kenya as United Kingdom is of strategic importance to Kenya as one of the key source markets for tourism and the perception held by them will be an indicator of how other markets in the rest of Europe and elsewhere perceive Kenya as a tourist destination in the wake of terrorism attacks and political violence.

Literature Review

Destination Image

The image of a place is important not only to a tourist but also to the tourist receiving country. It plays a crucial part in the travellers' decision process and consequently travel behaviours. Understanding images is helpful to marketers in positioning their destinations to potential tourists and knowing how it can satisfy their needs. While the importance of a destination's attractions and amenities cannot be underestimated, research shows that the image of a destination is of equal importance. It has been found that prospective tourists are not only influenced by a destination's potential for performance but also by their perceptions of the particular destination (Kim, 1998).

Destination image studies have been dominant areas of research since the early 1970s when Hunt examined the role of image in tourism development (Hunt 1975 cited in Hosany and Uysal, 2006). However, from a review of the existing literature, there is no unified definition and it appears there are various kinds of definitions adopted to describe the word image in different fields such as geography and psychology. Pearce (1988 cited in Selby, 2004) asserts that image is a term with vague and shifting meanings. Lawson and Bovy's definition (1977 cited in Jenkins, 1999 and also in Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) appears to provide a more

qualitative and holistic interpretation looking at destination image as the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place. Crompton's definition (1979, cited in Jenkins 1999) looks at destination image as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination. However, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) who have written a lot on destination image, comment that in many studies, the precise definitions are avoided or not explicitly stated and again Echtner and Prasad (2003) further assert that image is not only the individual traits or qualities but also the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others. Kotler (1994) refers to image as the net result of a person's belief, ideas, feelings, expectations and impressions about a place or an object that seems to partly agree with Crompton's idea above. Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) add their contribution to the debate on the definition of destination image and define it as visual or mental impressions of a place or a product experienced by the general public. From these various definitions, destination image is seen as a multidimensional construct comprising of two primary dimensions: cognitive and effective where cognitive component would be interpreted as beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination while effective components would refer to the appraisal of the effective quality of feelings towards the attributes and the surrounding environments. It can therefore be deduced that generally, images of a particular product, person or place will evoke feelings, ideas and reactions (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Cooper et al, 2005; Hosany and Uysal, 2006).

A destination, described in this study is any place which attracts visitors and people, is likely to be chosen if it meets the tourists' purpose of their trip, their motivations and at a price they can afford that offer value for money. Other factors that influence the final choice as cited by Doswell (2000) include: the success of the promotional message, ease of purchase and the appeal of the destination's image. A destination's attributes are mainly classified into two major categories: the primary category which includes innate characteristics such as climate, ecology, natural resources, cuisine, culture and historical architecture; the secondary characteristics are mainly built or introduced by the public or private sectors such as hotels, resorts, transportation and entertainment. Goeldener and Ritchie (2003) add that a destination's features can also be categorised by the characteristics of the resources such as cultural, historical, natural, events, recreation, sports and entertainment but the overall attractiveness of a location is therefore determined by its unique features. In the tourism literature, the destination mix is made up of four components commonly referred to as the four A's: attractions; amenities; accessibility and ambience (George, 2001).

Importance of Destination Image for tourism destination

From various studies, image is a crucial marketing concept in the tourism industry which is identified as critical for the success of an area's tourism development and an important aspect of a destination's marketing strategy (Chon, 1992; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al, 2002; Prentice and Andersen, 2003). Images are considered important by many countries that spend a lot of money to build positive images of their destinations and to project its image to prospective visitors so that the offering may become desirable to them (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). These can be seen in advertisements and other tourism promotion activities. There is a consensus among researchers on the usefulness and importance of

image, a view that is supported by Pike (2002) who notes that 142 articles about tourism image have been published in international tourism journals since 1973 to date. There is however more literature that has been published since 2000 after Pike's study on the importance of image. Pike notes that the most popular area for research has been mainly North America which is chosen in 58 works followed by Europe while Africa has only 14. The image research has mainly reflected different perspectives which include the relationship of image and destination choice; image formation process; image modification and change and image measurement. Pike's study further indicates that countries are the most popular destination type of interest analysed in 56 papers followed by states, cities, resort areas and provinces.

Destination image is significant due to its impact on the tourism-decision making process. It plays an integral and influential role in the traveller's decision process and consequently travel behaviours and therefore affects the pre-purchase destination selection process (Prentice and Anderson, 2003). For example, if a destination contains high quality tourist-recreation resources, but also has a negative image such as human rights abuses, violence, civil wars and inter-tribal clashes, diseases and poverty, consequently, many tourists will not want to go there. Further, image literature illustrates that perceptions of destinations and purchase decisions are positively correlated indicating that the image of an area is a critical selection factor (Prentice and Anderson, 2003).

One can conclude here that a good understanding of tourists' perceived image is important for destination marketers in order to entice potential customers and in addition, the data acquired from image studies is helpful in identifying a location's strength and weaknesses providing critical insights on service delivery and product development which are important in destination positioning.

Decision-Process for Travel

Understanding the consumer needs and buying process is the foundation of successful marketing. By understanding how buyers proceed through the decision-making process, the various participants in the buying procedure and the major influences on buying behaviour, marketers can acquire many clues about how to meet buyer needs.

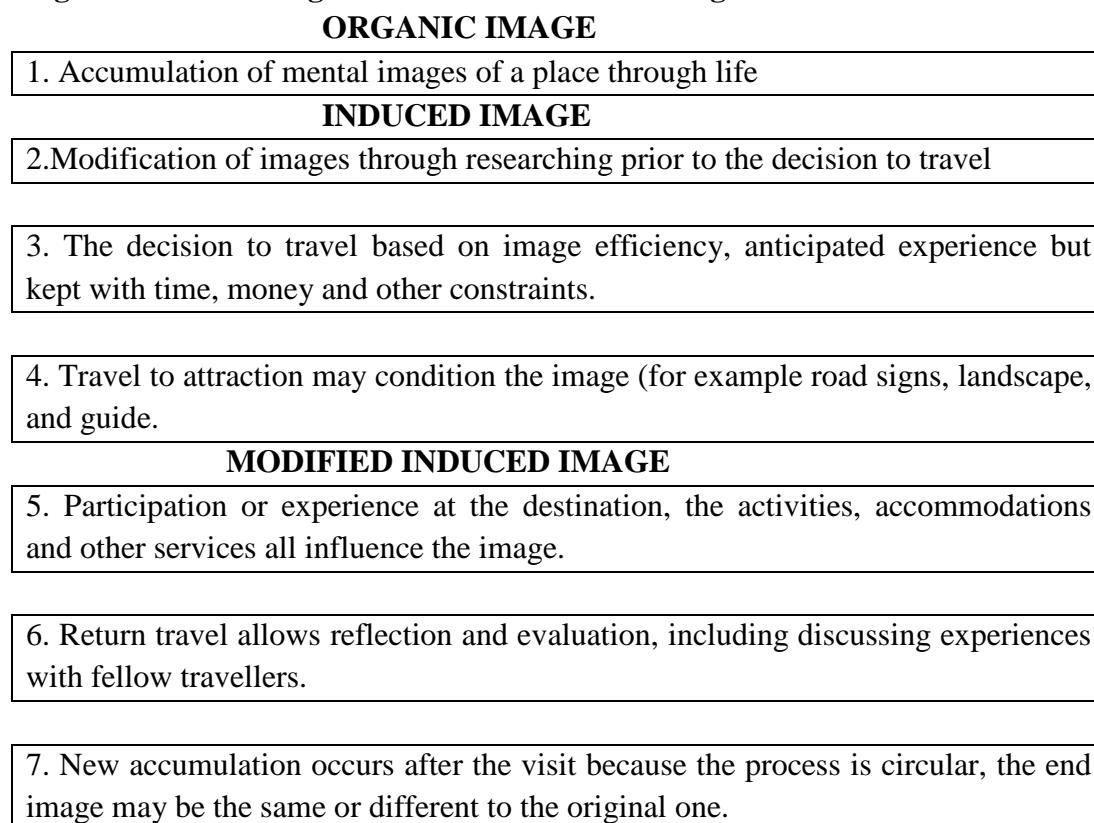
Factors influencing demand for tourism are closely linked to models of consumer behaviour and differences in attitudes, perceptions, images and motivations have an important influence on travel decisions. Kotler and Armstrong (2004) note that factors influencing travel are many such as cultural factors where cultural values, beliefs and attitudes dictate what is desirable and thus will have some influence on behaviour. Social factors such as the consumers' reference groups, family, social roles and status also influence behaviour while the personal factors include buyer's age and life-cycle stage, occupation, lifestyle and personality. Psychological factors include the buyer's motivation and learning processes. Motivation according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (cited in Cooper, 2005) can be viewed as a person's need any time where some needs are physiological such as hunger while others are psychological arising from need for recognition, esteem and belonging. For a person who is motivated, her buying behaviour will be influenced by how they perceive the environment around them. All of us learn about a stimulus by the flow of information through our five senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, however each of us receives, organizes and

interprets his sensory information in an individual way. Perception is the process by which people select, organize and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world, a point that should be noted by destination marketers (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999). Economic factors mainly include incomes and are crucial since they will affect a product's choice and it is considered that for many buyers, the richer they become the more they spend.

A person's buying-decision process will be affected by socio-economic determinants; the characteristics of the destination such as cost and the quality of attractions and amenities offered and the quantity of information available on the place which in turn affects the image of the area. Others are factors that provide promotional stimuli and thus promotional impact such as advertising, sales promotions, literature on the tours offered, recommendation of friends and travel trade (Doswell, 2000). Most models of buying decision process affirm that people go through pre-purchase; purchase and post purchase processes (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004).

The knowledge and comprehension stage is to make the customer goal directed. If the potential's traveller has been successfully motivated, it is likely that s/he will seek out more information on the destination through the various sources including, personal knowledge and experience; friends and relatives; checking the brochures; travel agents; internet and advertisements; news; television holiday programs or even editorials and government agents. Research reveals that potential travellers build a destination image based on exposure to information and persuasive information such as news and travel brochures. Similarly, the internet is increasingly a prominent media in tourism marketing and actively used by consumers as well as hotels, airlines, travel agents. Buhalis (2003) argue that people are using it for information search since the World Wide Web provides more in-depth materials and richer content compared with conventional promotional agents. It offers great potential in influencing consumers' perceived images which include creating virtual experiences of destination. Most travel information is now digitalized and easily accessed by every potential tourist. Buhalis (2003) assert that the internet has dramatically transformed the distribution and marketing of tourism products and that the consumption patterns have been shaped.

People will therefore go through processes before the final decision to travel. However, it is most likely that the more positive the image of a place is the more likely that people will go there (Cooper et al, 2005). This is one area that has been addressed in the current study-perceptions about Kenya and likelihood of visit. Marketers should be aware that people have different images of 'holidays' and destinations and people may see some things in the same way and others differently. It is likely that people within similar segment of society such as age group, education level and income bracket will view holiday experiences and perceptions in a similar way. Further, Doswell (2000) asserts that *'image of a place depends on how well educated or well travelled a person is and it changes according to the market and people's backgrounds and characteristics'* and so marketers should match the image of the destination to the requirements of the targeted market. For example, different promotion efforts should be aimed at different segments within the targeted population. In the current study, image of Kenya is assessed on different socio-demographic profiles of the respondents such as age, education level as well as marital status and incomes.

Image Formation Process**Figure 1: Gunn's stage-theories of destination image**

Source: Selby (2004: 70) after Gunn (1972:120)

According to Gunn's (1972) model, a traveller's experience process is explained on the basis of seven stages indicating an imaginary modification process and suggesting that a tourism destination could be modified over the seven stages as shown above.

Research Methodology**Research Design**

The aim of the research was to investigate the perceptions of Kenya as a premiere tourist destination in Africa for potential visitors from the UK. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The survey method was the most preferable due to the ability to collect a larger amount of data. According to Finn, Elliot-White and Walton, (2000), with the research design, it's possible to obtain scores from a large number of units. A combination of structured and unstructured response formats were chosen to reduce interviewer bias, enhance the clarity of answers and provide scope for respondents comments (Schall, 2003). The closed format for questions was predominantly used in order to obtain answers from subjects who may have a low motivation to answer questionnaire (De Vaus 1991) whilst open ended questions were also used as confirmed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) to achieve more deep knowledge from destination perceptions. The questionnaires were therefore used on a sample of 110 UK permanent residents in various locations in the city of Glasgow within a period of two weeks. Both genders were interviewed in the face to face random sampling interviews obtained across age, education, marital, employment and socio-economic categories which were

controlled by the researcher by asking the questions and writing down the answers whilst probing for clarity on various answers given. This was considered to be faster than letting the respondents write down the answers themselves. Some respondents however preferred to write the answers on their own. Before the study was undertaken however, a pilot study was conducted on twenty post graduate students to test the validity and reliability and to sort out any minor mistakes and misunderstandings. This occasioned changes to be made in some wordings of questions and format. The data collected in the study was coded and analysed using SPSS Version 14.0. Descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis were basically used for the analysis.

Study Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the study. Firstly, the questionnaire on potential visitors to Kenya was limited to only 110 respondents due to time constraints, whereas a higher target of more respondents would be more appropriate since a larger sample is seen to reduce the sampling error. However, the results from the sample are valid as argued by De Vaus '*the size of the population from which we draw is largely irrelevant for the accuracy of the sample, it is the absolute size of the sample that is important*' (De Vaus 1991). Further, it would have been more appropriate to include various categories of tourists to Kenya such as visitors, non- visitors as well as repeat visitors for the study to be more balanced. Secondly, due to time factor and limitation on resources, the study was only confined to the city of Glasgow as opposed to the entire UK market. For the Kenya government to benefit more, it would have been more appropriate to cover all the major markets of Kenya in Europe such as Germany, France and Switzerland and others. Finally, the research would have been more enriched and balanced in presentation by also using a qualitative method such as in-depth interviews from key stakeholders such as tour operators or travel agents in UK and tour leaders in key markets in Europe such as Thomas cook, TUI, Pollmans, Franco Rosso and others. Again, there was limited use of SPSS whereas more use of the package would have shown us more correlations and associations between variables.

As explained earlier regarding survey methods, most respondents felt uncomfortable when answering some questions such as incomes and the negative aspects about Kenya and some people declined to be interviewed citing various reasons such as they have never travelled outside Glasgow and therefore due to low incomes, they did not have any near future travel plans and hence no need for interviews. Most respondents were in a hurry and did not seem to think the answers through perhaps not giving the 'real' information and the inevitable involvement of the researcher in the investigative process may have biased the results (Clark, 1998). An example is where the respondents appeared cautious and apologetic when responding to negative perceptions of Kenya. Further, the attributes to be tested were predetermined by the researcher through interpretation of existing literature on destination image and all these factors therefore seem to limit and raise questions about the use of surveys in research. Although the investigation is believed to have succeeded in achieving its aim in the measurement of image, it has nevertheless illustrated the complexity of the concept. This provides an avenue for further research not only on image but also on other aspects of tourism for the Kenya industry such as sustainable tourism, economic and social impacts such as leakages and other areas and community gains.

Research Findings

Descriptive analysis of the sample group reveals that both male and female were surveyed at equal numbers of 55 which represents 50% of each group. This was possible since the survey was mainly controlled by the researcher who also kept a count on the numbers. All the respondents acknowledged that they had heard about Kenya and were UK permanent residents. Non-residents were not interviewed. There were different age profiles from the respondents with a 1.485 standard deviation and a mean of 3.05. Fifteen respondents (13.6%) were 16 – 24, 35 were 25 - 34 (31.8%) which represents the highest category of respondents. Nineteen were between 35 - 44 years (17.2%) while 20 were 45 - 54 (18.1%) and 55 - 64 were 12 representing 10.9% and the least category was those above 65 who were 9 representing 8.1%.

The highest number of respondents 49 (44.5.2%) believed that Kenya is the premier tourist destination in Africa while only 19 (17.2%) disagreed. Those who did not give any opinion or neither agreed nor disagreed were 42 (38.1%). The mean score was 4. 44 that was above average and a standard deviation of 1.280 thereby showing the majority agreed with the attribute. These positive perceptions was made regardless of the terrorist attacks in various locations in Kenya and the most recent being the Nairobi West gate attack and regardless of the negative travel advisories by the western media. This positive perception could be attributed to many factors such as marketing efforts by Kenya Tourism Board through international fairs such as WTM in London and ITB in Berlin, word of mouth from visitors among others. The convenience of access through charter flights and Kenya's national carrier-Kenya airways may also be a major reason. Many international movies and documentaries have also been shot in Kenya thereby enhancing the country's image. Another contributory factor could be the continuous featuring of Kenya in international marathons and sports and good bilateral relations with UK.

The peaceful elections in March 2013 without any violence could also be attributed to this perception. This needs to be interrogated further through more empirical research as to why Kenya is considered a premiere destination in Africa and comparisons also made with other key destinations in Africa such as South Africa and Tanzania and others. Further, the respondents were required to describe their perceptions of Kenya in their own words and there were many descriptions that came up which have been categorised and summarised as: the *physical environment and nature, climate, Socio- economic status, health and lastly people, culture and traditions* as shown in table 1.

The results therefore show that many respondents identify Kenya with its nature and physical environment and also its people, culture and traditions. Wildlife and animals are repeated severally while friendly, hospitable, traditions, culture are also repeated. Climate is described as good with words such as *pink sunset* and *sunny weather*. Kenya has also been identified with poverty with descriptions of hunger and starvation and a few mentions of disease and danger. This therefore means that Kenya's physical tourism product as well as culture and traditions are highly regarded but the perceptions of poverty and crime are also very high. The study results suggest that information messages sent by marketers should emphasise natural attributes associated with escape and recreation and also the cultural attributes.

Table 1: Description of Kenya by the respondents

Categories	Description
Physical environment and nature	Scenic, drought, wildlife, terrain, animals, safaris, resorts and beaches, nature, adventure, animals, wild nature, Giraffe, wooden masks, desert, fresh fruits, flowers, rich in nature, safari park/land, forest; wilderness.
Climate	Hot, nice/good weather, sunny, pink sunset.
Socio-Economic status	Poor, resourceful, slower life, cheap, expensive, deprived, developing, hunger, starvation, poverty, business opportunities, value for money,
Health	Diseases, dangerous, malaria.
People and culture and traditions	African, friendly, culture, black, traditions, beautiful, attractive, hospitable, unpredictable, colourful, warmth, homely, relaxed, Maasai culture, nice people, great fun, holiday, different, exotic, tourist hub, long distance runners, Jomo Kenyatta, unknown, big, space, unstable.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers concluded that Kenya has a favourable overall image as a premiere tourist destination by the UK market segment and therefore the image before the actual visitation to the destination is positive. Most respondents are in agreement with most of Kenya's positive attributes perceptions of premier destination.

This study provides support for the position that destinations that offer good and appealing product will likely be visited than those without (Doswell, 2000, Goeldener and Ritchie, 2003). It is possible that prospective tourists may hold high expectations of destinations which they have not yet visited and are willing to visit. As confirmed by a study by Baloglu and McCleary's (1999), research findings show that often non visitors hold inaccurate images of what a destination has to offer. Other studies suggest that perceptions changes completely after visitation to the destination (Awaritefe 2003). One would agree with Beerli and Martin (2004) that the development of the image should be based on reality otherwise the destination will not succeed in satisfying the tourist industry.

Further research is therefore necessary to find out especially the gaps and questions that have emerged from this study such as the specific reasons why the respondents see Kenya as a premiere destination in Africa. Other studies should compare Kenya with other destinations in Africa such as Nigeria, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa and other countries to compare these perceptions. The researcher notes that a future study of Kenya should be employed focussing on empirical studies and assessment of imagery attributes from prospective tourists, travel advisors, industry players, repeat visitors and also the level of standards of service. The study would also be more useful to the government if it was extended to the major markets of Kenya in Europe and perhaps USA and adopting both

qualitative and quantitative methods and a study of this nature should therefore be allocated not less than six months.

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