

**THE IMPACT OF DESTINATION IMAGE OF TOURISM RETENTION IN UGANDA: CASE
STUDY OF BWINDI NATIONAL PARK IN KANUNGU DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

In the context of this research Tourism can be defined as the temporary movement of the people to destinations away from their usual place or normal habitat, the activities entered upon during their stay in those destination and the facilities developed to provide their requirements / needs. On the other hand, destination image has been defined as the perception of travelers about a given tourist destination. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of destination image on tourist's retention in Uganda. The objectives of the study were to establish the formation of the image of tourist's destination in Bwindi impenetrable Nation Park, to assess the effects of the brand image of a tourist destination in Bwindi impenetrable National Park, to establish the advantages associated with destination image to Bwindi impenetrable National Park. The Case study research design was preferred and the qualitative research paradigm was adopted. Unstructured Interviews and document review analysis were the main methods applied for data collection. A sample size of twenty-two (65) respondents was involved in the study. These included tour guides and the tourism administrators. The study concluded that, globalization process has expanded markedly in recent years, increasing the difficulties experienced in virtually every sector of the economy. The tourism sector is no exception, and has been the target of the latest economic and financial crisis. In this sense, those responsible for tourism management should be aware of all elements that will improve their products. This is why Brand Image has become one of the most important elements of a tourist destination in recent years, is directly reflected in their positioning and ultimately increases the likelihood of commercial success or failure for each destination.

Key words: destination image, sustainable growth, Covid-19 and tourism retention

Background of the study

Tourism has become one of the most important sectors of the global economy (Ferreira, Rial and Varela, 2019). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), in 2008, the number of international tourist arrivals came to 924 million, representing an increase of 2% (16 million) compared to 2007 (Filstar, 2023). Revenues increased to 642 billion Euros in 2008, i.e., an increase of 1.7% compared to 2007. However, the results of 2019 worsened due to the international crisis that was caused by COVID-19 (Rial, Ferreira & Varela, 2019). Thus, every effort should be made to achieve sustainable growth for tourism (Nicholas et al., 2023). In this context, special attention has to be paid to the study and assessment of brand image or destination image (in the context of tourism) because it is one of the most important elements of a tourist destination.

The Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) is in southwestern Uganda. The park is part of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and is situated along the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) border next to the Virunga National Park and on the edge of the Albertine Rift. Composed of 321 square kilometers (124 sqm) of both montane and lowland forest, it is accessible only on foot. BINP is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization-designated World Heritage Site (Christopher & Felex, 2022).

Species diversity is a feature of the park. It provides habitat for 120 species of mammals, 348 species of birds, 220 species of butterflies, 27 species of frogs, chameleons, geckos, and many endangered species. Floristically, the park is among the most diverse forests in East Africa, with more than 1,000 flowering plant species, including 163 species of trees and 104 species of ferns. The park is a sanctuary for colobus monkeys, chimpanzees, and many birds such as hornbills and turacos (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). It is most notable for the 400 Bwindi gorillas, half of the world's population of the endangered mountain gorillas. 14 habituated mountain gorilla groups are open to tourism in four different sectors of Buhoma, Ruhijja, Rushaga and the Nkuringo in the Districts of Kanungu, Kabale and Kisoro respectively all under the management of Uganda Wildlife Authority (BINP website, 2021).

Problem Statement

Tourism is often used as the driving force for regional development, and it has been generally accepted in the literature that destination image has influenced tourists' behaviors. Tourists make their choices of where to travel based on the destination images being portrayed by the destination marketers but also based on their own images of a destination that come from many different sources, including sometimes past experiences with a destination (Nicholas et al., 2023). Chen and Tsai (2019) note that the evaluation of a destination is based on the perceived quality, value and overall satisfaction with a destination. it's against this background that there's a need for a study to establish the impact destination image on tourist retention.

Specific objectives:

- 1. To establish the formation of the image of tourist's destination in Bwindi impenetrable Nation Park*
- 2. To assess the effects of the brand image of a tourist destination in Bwindi impenetrable National Park*
- 3. To establish the advantages associated with destination image to Bwindi impenetrable National Park*

Research Questions:

- 1. What are the formations of the image of tourists' destination in Bwindi impenetrable National Park?*
- 2. What are the effects of the brand image of a tourists' destination in Bwindi impenetrable National Park?*
- 3. What are the advantages associated with destination image to Bwindi impenetrable National Park?*

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed quantitative approach to get respondents' experiences, views and suggestions' concerning role of community radios to agricultural development in Uganda. It employed a survey research design to elicit information about respondents and their knowledge about the impact of destination image of tourism retention in

Uganda. It was a qualitative study because it's concerned with qualitative phenomena, that is to say, phenomena involving the effect of destination image to tourist's retention.

Population

A population is the aggregate or totality of objects or individuals, having one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher and where inferences are to be made (Amin, 2005). In this study all staff of Bwindi impenetrable National Park constituted the population of the study.

Sample size

According to Amin (2005), a sample size or accessible population is the population from which a sample is actually drawn. In actual fact, sample results should be generalized only to the sampled population. In selecting the sample will achieve maximum precision in the estimates within the sample size to be considered.

To determine the sample size, the researcher used the following formula according to (Yamane, 1967).

$$N = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Whereby,

n = Sample size

N= Population under study

e = level of precision of 0.05 and confidence 95%

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{78}{1+78(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{78}{1+78(0.0025)} = \frac{78}{1+0.195} = \frac{78}{1.195} = 65.271967 = 65$$

Therefore, the sample size of the study was 65

The researcher used Yamane's formula above for determining the sample size because it is widely used for surveys and mixed research designs.

Sampling strategy

The study used a random sampling of up to 65 staff of Bwindi National Park. For a sampling design to be called a random sample, each element in the population must have an equal and independent chance of selection in the sample. Equal implies that the probability of selection of each element in the population is the same, that is, the choice of an element in the sample is not influenced by other considerations such as personal preference (Kumar, 2016).

Data Collection Methods

The study used questionnaire method for collecting data due to the fact that the method is free from bias of the interviewer and answers are given in respondents' words (Kothari, 2006). The questionnaires were distributed to farmers of Kitovu, Kajansi Town Council who listen to community radio as a source of their agricultural information.

The study used a qualitative approach in which structured questionnaires were used for data collection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the ordering of data into constituent parts in order to obtain answers to research questions (Ahuja, 2011). Before the start of data collection, the researcher sought for permission from the concerned administrators (community radio managers) in order to carryout research. The questionnaires were edited after they had been returned by respondents and after data was captured into the computer. Editing involved scrutinizing the finished questionnaires to identify and minimize as far as possible, any errors and gaps in the information that was obtained from the respondents.

RESULTS

Attributes of destination image

The study findings indicate that, Destination image attributes at Bwindi National park are scenery or natural attractions, costs or price levels, climate, tourist sites or

activities ,nightlife and entertainment, sports facilities or activities, national parks or wilderness activities, local infrastructure, transportation, architecture or buildings, historic sites, museums, beaches, shopping facilities, accommodation facilities, cities fairs, exhibits, festivals, facilities for information and tours, crowdedness ,cleanliness, personal safety, economic development or affluence, accessibility, degree of urbanization, extent of commercialization, political stability, hospitality or friendliness or receptiveness, different customs or culture, different cuisine or food and drink, restful or relaxing, atmosphere, opportunity for adventure, opportunity to increase knowledge, family or adult oriented ,quality of service and fame or reputation.

Factors that influence destination image

The study findings indicate that, the forces that drive destination image are stimulus factors and personal factors. This cocides with Gartner (2019) who classified image formation into five sections; overt induced, covert induced, autonomous, organic and visit the destination. Um and Crompton (1990) personal factors affect the formation of destination image. Beerli and Martin (2004) classified personal factors into two sections; socio-demographic characteristics and psychological characteristics.

Attributes of Satisfaction

The research findings indicate that Satisfaction are measured by efficiency, service quality, social value, play, aesthetics, perceived monetary cost, perceived risk, time & effort spent and perceived value. Satisfaction attributes were analysed by cognitive image of natural resources, cognitive image of service quality, cognitive image entertainment and affective image. Satisfactions of tourist measured by general satisfaction attribute satisfaction (i.e., attractions, accommodation, accessibility, amenities and activities) and met expectations.

The satisfaction attributes included attractions, lodging, dining, shopping, accessibility, activities and events and environment. Attributes like perceived attractions, perceived quality, perceived risk and perceived value used measure the satisfaction of tourists. Attributes like comfort facilities, safety & infrastructure, cultural attractions & shopping, tourist attractions & ambience and variety & accessibility affects tourist satisfaction.

Effects of Destination Image and Satisfaction on Loyalty

The findings indicates that, the positive relationship of environment, infrastructure, quality, value and intention to revisit with tourist experience and perceptions. The study further revealed that destination image had direct relationship with perceived quality, satisfaction and intention to return and willingness recommend others. This coincides with Gengoning Chi (2012) who developed and tested the theoretical model for building destination loyalty by using destination image and satisfaction. George & George (2004) investigated the direct relationship among post purchase behavior, place attachment, intentions revisit and novelty seeking. Alcaniz (2005) revealed that the resident behavior had direct influence on destination image, tourist experience and future behavior intentions.

Conclusion

The globalization process has expanded markedly in recent years, increasing the difficulties experienced in virtually every sector of the economy. The tourism sector is no exception, and has been the target of the latest economic and financial crisis. In this sense, those responsible for tourism management should be aware of all elements that will improve their products. This is why Brand Image has become one of the most important elements of a tourist destination in recent years, is directly reflected in their positioning and ultimately increases the likelihood of commercial success or failure for each destination.

Recommendations

Research results reveal that tourists are extremely satisfied with favorable attributes such as “Great and majestic forests and mountains”, “Many waterfalls and whirlpools with harmonious and exclusive scenery”. This convincingly proves that the mountain region in Bwindi National Park boasts many picturesque natural landscapes that attractive to tourists. Therefore, it is essential to develop this type of tourism in an intensive approach in order to promote the potential of natural tourism resources in Bwindi impenetrable National-park destinations. It is also suggested to promote the promotion and training of a tourism dedicated workforce.

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