Research Article

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The effect of tourists' perceptions of a tourism product on memorable travel experience: Implications for destination branding

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyse how tourists' perceptions of a destination's tourism product influences memorable tourism experiences and how gender differences influence tourists' perceptions of tourism product. To achieve these objectives, Uganda, one of the developing economies in East Africa, was chosen. The five A's of tourism product was used as a basis for the questionnaire construction and data was analysed. Explanatory research design within the framework of confirmatory factor analysis – a structural equation modelling technique was adopted using the AMOS 18 program. A sample of 501 respondents consisting of tourists departing Uganda through Entebbe International Airport was used.

Results showed that both the measurement and structural models exhibited better model fit indices. Overall, tourists' perceptions of the retained four dimensions of tourism product (Attractions, ancillary services, amenities and accommodation) had a positive effect on memorable travel experience. Additionally, the independent T-test for gender and tourists' perceptions of Uganda's tourism product showed that on average, females had a positive evaluation of Uganda tourism product compared to their male counterparts. However, the observed difference was not significant.

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It is recommended that destination management organisations pay attention to infrastructure, particularly transport that links potential and actual tourists to key tourism attractions. This is likely to enhance positive perceptions and was found to positively influence memorable travel experience. Other implications for destination branding are discussed.

Keywords: Tourists' perceptions, Tourism product, Memorable travel experience, Destination branding, Uganda.

1 Introduction

Various studies in tourism have used perceptions of visitors to evaluate destination performance (Pearce, 1982; Brown, 2003; Beerli, & Martı́n, 2004; Aschauer, 2010) and visitor behaviour (Stuart, Barnes, Mattsson & SØrensen, 2014). Understanding tourists' perceptions (TPs) provides a tool for tourism destinations to develop ways to nurture, develop and present their core tourism products and services (Engl, 2011, Herstein, Jaffe, & Berger, 2014). For destinations to be competitive, they must offer the tourism product or service that matches the characteristics of their target markets (Bonn, Sacha & Dai, 2005; Poria, Reichel & Biran, 2006; Moyle, Weiler & Croy, 2013). Axelsen and Swan (2010) argue that understanding perceptions of tourists enables the establishment, reinforcement, or even changing destination images.

In tourism and hospitality disciplines, perceptions are linked with destination image (Chen, Chen & Lee, 2010; Denstadli, Jacobsen & Lohmann, 2011). Some studies though have shown that tourism, as an activity, is all about experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Denove & Power, 2006). This paper espouses the definition of tourist perception as a process that involves cognitive, affective and

emotional components that helps an individual tourist to form images of a destination he/she visits. It can simply be referred to as an important building block of destination image formation (Baloglu, & McCleary, 1999a).

Whereas an attempt has been made to study perceptions associated with Uganda (see Lepp & Harris, 2008; Lepp, Gibson & Lane, 2010), the methods used in the data collection do not provide a holistic picture of the uniqueness of Uganda and how this can be exploited to achieve a successful destination branding process. To date, there remains no study that has comprehensively established TP of Uganda's tourism product. Understanding actual visitors' perceptions of Uganda's tourism product would help destination managers in designing and providing services that are relevant to the tourism market and this study fills this gap.

Additionally, as destinations seek to become distinctive, perceptions held by both potential and actual visitors need to be examined (Baloglu, & Mangaloglu, 2001) and previous studies on Uganda have only considered the potential visitors. This paper sets to achieve three objectives. First, to develop a TP scale and establish the current state of Uganda's tourism product; second, to establish the relationship between TPs of Uganda's tourism product and memorable travel experiences (MTEs) and finally, to establish whether gender has any significant influence on perceptions of a tourism product in Uganda.

2 Literature review

TP has received little attention in tourism research compared to destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2000; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Despite Uganda being known for its unique tourism product, such as being a home for 75% of the world population of mountain gorilla, few studies have attempted to establish and analyse the perceptions held by visitors to Uganda.

Lepp, Gibson and Lane (2010) study established that there is low risk attached to Uganda and that the website images provide the actual representation of Uganda. However, the study does not fully provide a full account of the tourist experiences that would effectively be used in ascertaining MTEs an important factor in the destination branding efforts. Tourism product, in this paper, is construed to mean the five A's of a tourism product; that is, accessibility, accommodation, attractions, amenities and ancillary services (Mill & Morrison, 1985; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Smith, 1994).

2.1 Current TPs of 'Uganda's brand'

The first objective for this study was to identify and assess the current perceptions of the Uganda from tourists' perspective. The search for current perceptions of the 'Uganda's brand', 'Uganda's image' using Google scholar at http://scholar.google.com did not yield any scholarly article on this topic. When the search was extended to www.google.com, just one article from the local daily was obtained titled 'Uganda must market itself as a super brand to give products an edge globally' (Musani, 2010).

Additional search conducted using other non-academic search engines yielded a few articles portraying negative images of Uganda. For example, Sturges (2008) refers to Uganda as 'bandit' country when exploring the civil conflict in northern Uganda 1986–2007. Sturges (2008) provides a one-sided assessment of Uganda as a tourist destination. Additionally, Lepp, Gibson and Lane (2010) in their study identified perceptual dimensions associated with Africa. The authors viewed Africa as being one country and primitive, varied cultural differences, violence, war and crime and interpersonal issues (p. 681) and yet Uganda is one of the countries found in the East Africa region..

In general, the perceptions held about most African tourist destinations, including Uganda are negative and the image varies from one country to another. To date, there is no study that has been conducted aimed at establishing the current perceptions of Uganda's brand. Therefore, this study set out to establish the current general perceptions of 'Uganda's brand' from the tourists' perspective.

2.2 Gender and TPs

The second objective was to establish whether gender influences perceptions about the destination visited. Tourist perceptions and travel experiences from a given destination form one the major approaches of studying destination branding (Lew, 1987). MacCannell (1973) argues that, tourists' ability to penetrate into the core or back region of different aspects of a tourism product in order to experience the authenticity of a destination is one of the goals for most tourists. Perceptions, in general, reflect the way consumers organise and interpret information about products (Vogt & Andereck, 2003).

The need to establish the effect of TPs on MTE is important for destinations. Perceptions that give rise to constructed meanings about a destination vary from one individual to another. For example, Stabler (1995);

Beerli and Martín (2004); Meng and Uysal (2008) found that some personal characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, education and social class influence the way individuals perceive places. This provides an opportunity for individuals to fulfil intrinsic needs that create emotional attachment to a destination once visited thus creating memorable experiences (Ryan, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesised that;

HI: Gender significantly influences perceptions about a destination.

2.3 Tourists' perceptions and memorable travel experience

In order to fully understand the importance of establishing the TPs of Uganda's destination brand, an understanding of the link between a destination and its brand must be made clear through its tourism product and MTEs. According to Briciu (2013), a destination is defined as 'a geographical space in which a cluster of tourism resources exist, rather than a political boundary' (p. 9). A destination is shaped by the prevailing economic, social, political and other environmental factors that influence the way tourism activities impact on different aspects of a destination in question.

In order for destinations to differentiate themselves, a clear understanding and planned development and management of key aspects of the destination that represent it must be sought out. To achieve this, an appropriate destination brand is necessary to help destinations determine the future in terms of making promises to the tourists who visit together with the local communities who live and represent the destination (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Gover & Go, 2011) based on their MTEs.

The link between TPs and memorable experiences though critical in destination branding, has not been studied. The variation in meaning construction about a destination of interest is thought to be caused partly by tourists having different cultural backgrounds or due to different sources of information or complete recreation of new meaning attached to different destination attributes (Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Vogt & Stewart, 1998). The different information sources emphasising different aspects of a destination create the opportunity for tourists to construct their own meaning of the destination. This in a way can help in creating beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. Any new information obtained about a particular destination through experiencing different aspects of a tourism product has the ability to create experiences that are memorable (Braun, 1999; Ryan, 2010).

Perceptions are important in MTE because they involve all active processes aimed at creating rather than recording reality (Curry, Meyer, & McKinny, 2006). This description of perceptions is in agreement with Schiffman and Kanuk (1991) who posits that perception is a process by which individuals select, organise and interpret stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. Curry *et al.* (2006) maintain that for an individual to understand the stimuli to which he/she attends, factors such as individual experience, education and cultural values come into play.

Factors such as individual experience of destination tourism product provide an individual the ability to interpret the input received by the body's sensory receptors. The outcome of stimulation of sensory receptors such as eyes, ears prompts different emotions such as joy, happiness, which vary from one individual to another (Lucas, 2010). This study posits that it is these emotions that arise after appraising the different stimuli from different aspects of a tourism product that is responsible for MTE formation.

McKercher (2008), for example, underscores the importance of accessibility as being central to the success of a destination. He opines that accessibility is important in enabling tourists experience at the destination and attractions therein. Physical access enables the destination to provide viable products and services. The understanding of TPs about destinations is likely to help in creating images that will differentiate the destinations' offerings (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; McKercher & Guillet, 2011). It is therefore hypothesised that;

H2: TPs positively influence MTE

3 Methodology

This study was guided by a hypothetico-deductive paradigm (Jennings, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005). A convenient sample of 501 respondents made of international visitors departing through Entebbe International Airport for a period of 4 months (January to April 2012) was used.

3.1 Questionnaire and scale development

To ensure validity and reliability of the measurement scale for the research instrument, a comprehensive procedure for developing measures for each construct was followed (Churchill, 1979). Items to measure TPs of Uganda's tourism product were selected based on the five A's (attractions, accommodation, amenities, accessibility and ancillary services) model of a tourism product. Individual measurement items were adapted from Correia, do Valle and Moco (2007a) and Yüksel and Yüksel (2001a) and were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale where *1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree*.

MTE scale was adapted from (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2010; Kim, 2010). Kim et al. (2010) report the composite reliability (ρc) of the 24-item scale as ranging from 0.81 to 0.90 (p. 6). The scale was anchored on a seven-point Likert-type scale, on which 1 represented 'I have not experienced it at all' and 7 represented 'I have experienced it very much'.

3.2 Pilot study results

To ascertain whether the sample size was adequate for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used (Budaev, 2010). For the pilot study, a KMO = 0.771 was obtained for TPs and Bartlett's test of sphericity χ^2 (276) = 678.71, p < 0.001, indicating that correlations between items were sufficiently large for factor analysis to be carried out (Field, 2009). The retained 24 items for tourist perception scale had overall alpha coefficient α = 0.928 showing high internal consistency. The five factors explained 75.5% of common variance.

Finally, for MTE, the exploratory factor analysis procedure led to retaining of 21 items with overall alpha coefficient (α) = 0.944; KMO = 0.819; χ^2 (210) = 798.43, *p* < 0.00 with five factors explaining 76.4% common variance. In the final study, the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity for TPs and MTE were all in the acceptable ranges.

4 Results

The sample was made up of males (50.1%) and females (49.9%). Most of respondents were single (47.5%) followed by those who were married (46.1%). The age bracket of 20–29 had the highest number of respondents with (31.5%), followed by those who were 50 and above with (25.3%).

4.1 Tourists' perceptions

Results indicated that out of 24 items, 17 items had a mean value greater than 4 = neutral) while only 7 items were rated below the neutral value. This means that TPs of Uganda's different aspects of the tourism product within the sample of the tourists being surveyed were positive. Table 1 shows mean and standard deviation for all items.

The results show that there is need for improving on aspects of Uganda's tourism product with low mean values such as quality of infrastructure (M = 3.19; SD = 1.570) and tourism information centres (M = 3.45; SD = 1.333). This improvement is likely to improve the image of Uganda as a tourism destination.

4.2 Memorable travel experience

Table 2 shows that items associated with hedonism and local culture were rated highly having mean values close to 6 while the least item was connected with meaningfulness item of *Learning new skills to survive* with (M = 3.74, SD = 1.927). Table 2 shows the summary of the descriptive statistics for MTE scale.

4.3 Assessment of current TP of the Uganda's brand

Current TPs were measured using the commonly used brand positioning statements about Uganda. The majority of the respondents preferred the use of 'Uganda the pearl of Africa' with 194 (38.7%), to position Uganda followed by 'Uganda gifted by nature' 170 (33.9%) and finally, 'Uganda the Africa's friendliest country' with 116 (23.2%). This was an opinion question that required respondents to choose one or provide another alternative under category 'other', which contributed 4.2% with 21 respondents.

4.4 The influence of gender on perceptions of a destination

In order to assess whether gender had any influence on TPs of Uganda as a destination, the mean values of the items from the final scale for TP were used (Preacher & Kelley, 2011). The composite variable TP was obtained by averaging 11 items retained representing the five components of Uganda's tourism product of accessibility, amenities, attractions, ancillary services, and accommodation.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation values for TPs (N = 501)

Code	Item	Mean	Std. deviation
AB1	Uganda is an inexpensive destination	4.81	1.586
AB2	Uganda is an easily accessible destination	4.58	1.514
AB3	Uganda offers value for money	5.06	1.284
AB4	Uganda has good road signs	3.20	1.558
AB5	Uganda has efficient local transportation	3.64	1.527
AC1	Uganda has high quality accommodation	4.60	1.512
AC2	Uganda has variety of food selection	4.58	1.571
AC3	Uganda's hygiene standards are high	3.50	1.484
AC4	Uganda has excellent standards of service	3.93	1.460
AM1	Uganda has a variety of entertainment options	4.30	1.317
AM2	Uganda has good shopping alternatives	4.10	1.343
ANC1	Uganda has good quality of tourism support services	4.38	1.410
ANC2	Personal security is not a problem in Uganda	4.71	1.570
ANC3	Uganda's quality of the infrastructure is good	3.19	1.570
ANC4	Uganda provides easy immigration procedures	4.88	1.454
ANC5	Uganda has enough tourist information centers	3.45	1.333
AT1	Uganda is a popular destination	4.13	1.551
AT2	Uganda has spectacular surroundings	5.97	1.078
AT3	Uganda has unique cultural attractions	5.32	1.292
AT4	Ugandan people are friendly	6.28	0.889
AT5	Uganda's climate is good	6.03	0.997
AT6	Uganda has good natural attractions	6.22	0.931
AT7	Uganda's environment is not polluted	3.41	1.686
AT8	Uganda provides a relaxing atmosphere	5.15	1.315

Note: The mean values are based on a seven-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 Slightly disagree, 4 = Neutral, 5= Slightly agree, 6 = Agree and 7 = Strongly agree

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation values for MTE (N = 501)

Code	Items	Mean	Std. deviation
HD1	Thrilled while engaging in this travel experience	5.27	1.370
HD2	Indulged in different activities during this travel experience	5.41	1.297
HD3	Really enjoyed this tourism experience	5.94	1.069
HD4	Had an exciting experience	5.87	1.127
IV1	Visiting a place that I have longed to visit	5.02	1.587
IV2	Enjoying tourism activities that I really wanted to do	4.78	1.810
LC1	The local people made good impression on me	5.76	1.202
LC2	Experiencing the local culture in the areas I visited	5.57	1.319
LC3	Local people friendliness in the areas I visited	5.97	1.147
MN1	Learning about myself from this travel experience	4.69	1.723
MN2	A self-discovery experience	4.21	1.814
MN3	Gaining new knowledge about Uganda	5.70	1.274
MN4	Learning new skills to survive	3.74	1.927
NV1	It was once-in-a-life experience	4.93	1.925
NV2	It was quite different from my previous experiences	5.08	1.703
NV3	It was a unique experience	5.45	1.473
NV4	Experienced something new	5.71	1.394
RF1	It was a liberating experience	4.41	1.575
RF2	Enjoying sense of freedom	4.62	1.642
RF3	Refreshing experience	4.97	1.466
RF4	Revitalised through this travel experience	4.77	1.492

Note: Mean value is based on a seven-point Likert scale with 1 = Not experienced at all, 2 = Not experienced, 3 = Somewhat not experienced, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat experienced, 6 = Experienced and 7 = Experienced very much. MTE: memorable travel experience.

Lavene's test of homogeneity of variance showed non-significant value for the relationship between gender and TPs showing that homogeneity of variance was not violated (Field, 2009). Table 3 shows the independent t-test for gender and TPs.

Table 3: Independent t-test for gender and TPs (N = 501)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	df	F	p-value (2-tailed)
Gender					499	0.691	0.258
Male	250	4.284	0.850	0.054			
Female	251	4.368	0.811	0.051			

TPs: tourists' perceptions.

The independent t-test revealed that the value of *t* was −1.13, with degree of freedom of 499 and was not significant at p > 0.05. From the mean values for each group, it can be seen that on average, females perceived Uganda's tourism product positively with (M = 4.368, SE = 0.051) than their male counterparts (M = 4.284, SE = 0.054). However, the difference in perceptions of Uganda's tourism product between males and females was not significant t (499) = −1.133, p > 0.05 and the effect size was r = 0.051, which, according to Cohen (1988, 1992), suggests a negligible effect size.

4.5 The influence of TPs on MTE

To establish the influence of TPs on MTE, a confirmatory factor analysis for TP of Uganda's tourism product and MTE was performed. Both TP and MTE were conceptualised as second order latent variables. Therefore, a hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken using a two-step method of structural equation modelling. The two-step method involves estimation of the model fit for the measurement model in the first stage and structural model in the second stage for testing study hypothesis.

For TPs, all the 24 items retained from the pilot study were used. The null model obtained had a poor fit of the data with χ^2 (242) = 1158.048, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 4.785; TLI = 0.727; CFI = 0.761; and RMSEA= 0.087 with 90% confidence interval (CI) = 0.082−0.092, p < 0.00. These results indicate a poor model fit to the data and it was therefore necessary to re-specify the model (Kline, 2011).

A post hoc analysis was carried out involving the deletion of items that had lower factor loadings. Kline (2011) recommends retaining items with factor loading value of 0.7 and above. This procedure resulted in deletion of the 13 items that had low factor loadings thus obtaining an acceptable good model fit: χ2 (38) = 94.237, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 2.48; TLI = 0.947, CFI = 0.963 and RMSEA = 0.054 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.041−0.068), p = 0.283.

Results further showed that four factors reflecting attractions with composite reliability (ρ_c) = 0.745 and Average variable explained (AVE) = 0.50; Ancillary services (ρ_c = 0.800; AVE = 0.44); Amenities (ρ_c = 0.700; AVE = 0.57); and accommodation (ρ_c = 0.700; AVE = 0.50), which all showed that the reliabilities and convergent validity tests for the TP scale was archived.

4.6 Second order confirmatory factor analysis for TPs

In order to ascertain whether the four retained factors were reflective indicators of TP, a hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis was carried out (Jarvis, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003; Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder & vanOppen, 2009). Wetzels et al. (2009) advocates for the application of higher order by creating second order latent variables so that concurrent and discriminant validity can be demonstrated.

The fit indices for the null second order model for TPs obtained without carrying out any modification were: χ^2 (40) = 117.879, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 2.95; TLI = 0.930; CFI = 0.949; SRMR = 0.053; RMSEA = 0.062 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.050−0.076), p = 0.056. The model fit for a second order model confirms that indeed the four factors retained were true reflective indicators of TPs of Uganda's tourism product.

4.7 First order confirmatory factor analysis for MTE

MTE in this study was conceptualised as a second order latent variable with six reflective components of hedonism, involvement, novelty, meaningfulness, refreshment and local culture. Unlike the original study conducted by Kim (2010) on development of MTE scale that had seven components, one component of knowledge was merged

with meaningfulness at the pilot study stage because the original items on meaningfulness had very low factor loading and had high cross loading with knowledge component.

After the initial confirmatory factor analysis that included all the 21 items, the null model fit indices were: χ^2 (174) = 825.509, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 4.744; TLI = 0.840; CFI = 0.867; RMSEA = 0.087 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.081–0.093), p = 0.000, indicating poor model fit for the data. Model re-specification followed a series of post hoc analysis in order to establish the best model fit for the data, which is required for final measurement and structural model for hypothesis testing. Conducting post hoc analysis led to the deletion of 8 items because of having lower factor loadings leaving a total of 13 items for further estimation.

The final first order measurement model for MTE had good fit indices with χ^2 (59) = 239.648, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 4.062; TLI = 0.922; CFI = 0.941; SRMR = 0.049; RMSEA = 0.078 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.068–0.089), p = 0.000. The results indicate that an adequate model fit enables further analysis to be achieved. Four factors were retained consisting of hedonism (ρ_c = 0.749; AVE = 0.60); novelty (ρ_c = 0.831; AVE = 0.638); refreshment (ρ_c = 0.748; AVE = 0.543) also showing adequate reliability and convergent validity.

4.8 Second order confirmatory factor analysis for MTE

The same procedure recommended by Byrne (2010) was followed in order to establish whether the factor structure obtained from first order confirmatory factor analysis for MTE would hold for second order hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis. The fit indices for the null second order model for MTE obtained without carrying out any were: χ^2 (61) = 242.179, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 3.97; TLI = 0.924; CFI = 0.940; SRMR = 0.0514 RMSEA = 0.077 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.067–0.087), p = 0.000. The model fit for a second order model shows that MTE is best reflected by four latent variables of hedonism, novelty, refreshment and local culture. According to the fit index cut-off recommended by (Kline 1998, 2011; Hair et al., 2010, p. 672), the results show that this model fits the data very well and is therefore satisfactory for further analysis of the final structural model needed for hypothesis testing.

4.8.1 Hypothesis testing

The second objective of this study was to empirically investigate the influence of TPs on MTE. The two-step approach of confirmatory factor analysis requires the estimation of the measurement model. The unconstrained measurement model for the TPs and MTE was relatively good with model fit indices: χ^2 (265) = 719, p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 2.716; TLI = 0.897; CFI = 0.909; RMSEA = 0.059 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.053–0.064), p = 0.003. The second step was to estimate the structural model as summarised, which
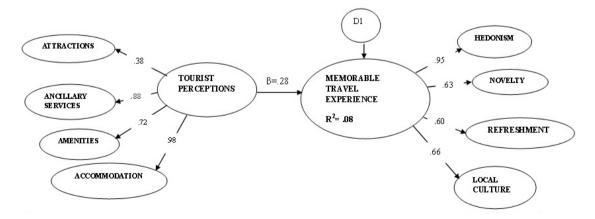

Figure 1: Final structure model for tourists' perceptions and memorable travel experience

Note: Model fit indices: χ^2 (264) = 6 4 6 . 3 9 7, p < 0 .000; χ^2/df = 2.448; TLI = 0 .913; CFI = 0 .923; RMSEA = .054 at 90% confidence interval (CI) (0.049–0.059) p = 0.113 ATTR–attractions; ANCIL–ancillary services; AME–amenities, ACCO–accommodation, TOUPERC–tourists' perceptions. HEDON–hedonism; REFRESH–refreshment; LOCCUL–local culture METEXP–memorable travel experience

had a much better model fit after slight modification as in Figure 1.

Results indicate that TPs of Uganda's tourism product positively influence MTE ($\beta = 0.28$, S.E = 0.170, t = 5.024, p < 0.001). These results also indicate that the probability of obtaining a critical value as large as 3.141 in absolute values was 0.002. Furthermore, the results from the analysis revealed that the regression weight for TPs in predicting MTE is significantly different from zero at 0.001 (two-tailed), thus supporting the hypothesis that TPs positively influences MTE. TPs explained 8% of variance observed in MTE.

5 Discussion

Results from the independent t-test between gender and TP of Uganda's tourism product showed that on average, females had a positive evaluation of Uganda's tourism product compared to their male counterparts. However, this observed difference was not significant at t (499) = –1.133, $p > 0.05$, r = 0.051. These results have marketing implications for Uganda's tourism product. For example, when designing promotional messages informing potential tourists about different aspects of Uganda's tourism product,, a uniform message referring to the tourist attractions, accommodation, accessibility, amenities and ancillary services need not vary so much.

However, the messages should be aimed at improving male's perception of Uganda's tourism product by emphasising activities and services that would be more emotionally appealing to males in order to improve their low agreement with different aspects of a tourism product. These results are consistent with those underpinning work by India in its 'Incredible India' destination branding campaigns with excellent experiential collateral and media outputs differentiated by gender (Geary, 2013; Kerrigan, Shivanandan & Hede, 2012).

Results from the hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis showed that accommodation ancillary services and amenities were the key factors that shaped TP of the overall Uganda's tourism product. Attractions contributed the least with factor loading ($\beta = .43$). This appears to indicate that despite Uganda having a variety of tourist attractions; it has not taken advantage of this advantage due to poor transport infrastructure. This is clearly seen in the rating given by all respondents on the item of infrastructure with (M = 3.19), which was the lowest rated in TP scale (see Table 1).

This finding points to what Hsu, Wolfe, and Kang (2004) established in their study that destinations lacking key resources such as natural tourist attractions, but which are able to effectively use the available resources, are in a position to be more competitive than those endowed with a wealth of resources. Uganda is endowed with abundant natural attractions, but lacking in infrastructure such as good road networks to enable easy access to these attractions. This means that revenue is lost because poor accessibility hinders tourists' ability to travel to certain attractions with poor accessibility such as the case of Kidepo Valley National Park in the northeastern part of Uganda.

The second objective of this study was to establish whether TPs had a positive influence on MTE. Theoretically, the results indicate that when TP of different aspects of a tourism product improves, MTEs are also likely to improve. The practical implication of this finding lies in tourism product development. Emphasis on infrastructural components such as accessibility in terms of easy immigration procedures, good road networks and good road signs that help tourists access different tourist attractions easily is likely to improve the attractions perceptions, which, in this study, had the lowest factor loading of 0.43.

Emphasis on the continued provision of excellent variation in accommodation and ancillary services such as security, telecommunications, internet services and amenities make the stay of tourists more comfortable, thus facilitating MTEs and the advantages that accrue from them: favourable behavioural intentions linked with positive word of mouth and a willingness to recommend the destination (Vogt & Andereck, 2003). Perceptions of familiarity and product knowledge were found to influence product preferences or evaluation (Goodrich, 1978). This means that destination evaluation after interacting with its different aspects, especially the tourism product, has an effect on memorable experience.

Additionally, Quan and Wang (2004) established that if some aspect of a tourism product such as accommodation is unsatisfactory, the whole travel experience is somehow influenced negatively. This means that in addition to providing novel services, some level of familiar products, especially food and drinks should be taken care of in order to create the 'psychological island of home' (ibid, p. 302).

Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore (1988, 1999) argued that perceptions play a critical role in creating a stage for the consumer decision-making process. Perceptions and subsequent destination images about a destination can be influenced throughout the consumption process as well as outside the consumption process because consumers

are able to remember certain outstanding aspects in the consumption process. Destination marketing managers must therefore have ability to identify or even develop and provide services within the tourism product that can influence the whole decision making process in favour of the destination (Braun, 1999).

Destinations management organisations have to manage the tourism product to encourage visitor involvement in order to enhance MTEs. In this study, tourists' involvement had little impact on MTE because the product offered in Uganda does not support visitor active participation. The results contradicted the findings of Kim (2010) who established that involvement was critical in creating MTE.

6 Conclusion

The results from testing the first hypothesis H1: that, TPs directly and positively influence MTE contributes to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between TPs and MTE established to be strong and positive. This finding is important for destination marketing organisations, particularly those involved in tourism product and service design. Appropriately designed tourism products and services have the ability to stimulate thoughts and senses, which in turn are able to trigger both cognitive and sensory experiences that foster the creation of MTEs. This observation is particularly explained by appraisal theory. which shows that the created perceptions of different aspects of a tourism product have the ability to influence image formation.

This study identified and assessed the current perceptions of 'Uganda's brand' from the viewpoint of the tourists who were visiting Uganda for holiday, visiting friends and relatives, volunteering, different religious missions and other non-business-related reasons. Tourists had nearly equal preference of the use of 'Uganda the pearl of Africa' and 'Uganda gifted by nature'. However, Uganda the pearl of Africa was the most preferred representation of Uganda as a brand.

A number of limitations have to be acknowledged. First, the study used a convenience sample, which minimises the generalisability capacity of the study findings. However, the sample employed in this study represented different markets from 59 countries with a fair representation from all continents of the world. In addition, based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample of 501 respondents is considered adequate therefore the results can be relied on to inform policy on tourism development.

Finally, quantitative methods of data collection limited the richness of data in terms lived experiences as told by the respondents and future studies need to consider qualitative methods of data collection such as in-depth interviews.

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