Full Length Research Paper

Competiveness of Cultural Sites as Ecotourism Destinations in Kisumu County: A Sustainable Development Perspective

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Sustainability of Cultural sites as ecotourism destinations remains a crucial global engine of development and it is clearly in the interest of ecotourism sector to maintain and sustain the cultural sites as basis for prosperity of ecotourism destinations. The study intended to bring information on the significant sustainability factors of cultural sites to pinpoint state of art in sustainability of ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County. Sustainability of cultural sites for development of ecotourism destinations requires a sound planning process with continuous management of the key elements that support ecotourism and its destinations such as maintenance of cultural assets, local community involvement and ecosystem planning of destinations. Sustainability of cultural sites requires an ongoing commitment of resources and operational processes that address continuous improvement of the overall destination covering a range of social, economic and management issues of ecotourism destinations. This paper sought to determine significant sustainability factors of cultural sites as ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County and its environs. . This study was premised on Expectancy-Theory and Place Branding Theory. The study adopted descriptive embedded case design and cross-sectional survey in the three selected units of analysis methodology with both quantitative and qualitative approaches to source and analyze data. The finding established that branding is a positive move to ensure sustainability of cultural sites impression as ecotourism destinations and sustainability of livelihood of the local community in Kisumu County and its environs.

Keywords: Sustainability**,** cultural sites, impressions, Ecotourism, Branding Destinations, Kisumu County

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is regarded as one of the most important economic sectors worldwide UN World Tourism Organization (2011) estimated a continuous growing of ca 4% per year, with 982 million tourists' arrivals and 740 billion Euro export earnings generated. One billion tourists have travelled the world in 2012 making a new record for international tourism – a sector that

accounts for one in every 12 jobs and 30% of the world's services exports. The figure confirms tourism position as one of the world's largest economic sectors, accounting for 9% of the global GDP(direct, indirect and induced impact), one i9n every 12 jobs and up to 8% of the total exports of the world's least developed countries (LDCs).

The UN WTO, (2012) in "The future we want" reported that a well designed and managed tourism can make a significant contribution to the three dimensions of sustainability development by creating linkages to other sectors, decent jobs and generations of trade opportunities; supports up scaling sustainable ecotourism activities and relevant capacity building that promotes environmental awareness, conservation and improve welfare and livelihood of the communities by supporting the local economies. The UN WTO, (2012) reported the need to encourage the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism, including ecotourism and cultural tourism to create small and medium enterprises(SMEs) and facilitate access to finance including micro-credit initiatives for the poor, indigenous people and local communities in areas with high ecotourism potential.

A study by Kozak, (2004) emphasizes that sustainable tourism permits to develop an area by attraction and creation of economic, social and environmental resources without compromising the abilities and resources of future generation, but just like any other sector, faces competitive forces arising substantially in the present global society.

According to Godfrey & Clerke, (2002) sustainability becomes synonymous with long-term competitiveness; while Ritchie & Crouch (2002) supported that sustainability is the base of success of the competitiveness of destination.

Franch, Martini & Buffa (2010) suggest that sustainability of tourism destinations is realistic if all stakeholders can agree priorities: ecological maintenance, local community and tourist satisfaction. Therefore, often managers are looking to establish strategies and operational frames that lead to the achievement of sustainable competitive edge of tourist destinations. The main goal of regional governments and destination management organizations is to increase the competitiveness of their destinations by quality strategies formulations as a key factor of comparativeness.

Harrison (2003) affirms that if tourism is to be considered a legitimate avenue for attracting resources, specific strategies need to be put in place. These strategies require direction from state in terms of appropriate policies, plans and regulatory frameworks and support of private sector and community stakeholders. The main condition for sustainable tourism is an efficient planning practice, a systematic implementation of plans, a continues and efficient management in addition to increasing stakeholder involvement. Sustainable development of tourism must support and ensure that social, cultural and economic development of the affected communities, to offer quality products to satisfy consumer, to ensure adequate management and monitoring.

According to Ene & Baraitaru(2010) An appropriate strategy for sustainable tourism should contribute to job creation at local level, build structures that encourage investments, facilitates cooperation between public and private sector, provide relief to those who intend to work in the tourism sector, ensuring understanding of role played by tourism in local and national economies.

Literature Review

Key Sustainability factors of cultural sites as ecotourism destinations

Cultural sites has grown over the years with legacy of thousands of years of history with material traces of historic buildings and architectural features (dry stone walls, chapels, fountains, vernacular buildings) (EC, 2002), with a wealth of immaterial culture, be it customs, folklore, know-how, handicraft, culinary specialities, music, dance and others where every village has its distinctive advantage which identifies and differentiates it from the neighbourhood.

The majority of South East Europe (SEE) has made considerable efforts to make inventory and conserve cultural sites which are internationally unique and outstanding examples are recognized through nominations as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. In Europe there are over 962 such sites listed among them 745 cultural sites, so there are no doubt that this immense heritage has the ability to attract tourists, not only to actual sites but also to surrounding areas. Cultural sites (CS) has not been prioritized for natural development unless its relationship with social value and local development is made clear, this economic venture constitutes an essential engine for ecotourism growth where measurable economic results of CS include: job creation and diversification of households income streams; stable property values and small business incubation. It is true that cultural sites are important for developing ecotourism in our counties for creating direct and indirect jobs. It is necessary to identify appropriate solutions to increase the ecotourism ventures on these sites and strengthen revenue generation streams while preserving the social value and beauty of the cultural sites.

Culture and ecotourism are considered niche tourism with enormous potential of growth, there is a growing market for targeted tourism with strong interactions in the triangle nature, culture and people (Mareno, 2011). Ecotourism and culture are coherent in standards of tourism where sustainable ecotourism is a step beyond, interlinking the focus nature approach

for development. Cultural sites focuses on history and cultural practices which concerns common interest of the world population that require environmentally compatible services and infrastructure. It is a form of tourism that focuses on culture and cultural environments (includes landscapes), the values and lifestyles, heritage, visual and performing arts, traditions and leisure assets of community; it extends cultural events, visits to museums and mixing with local people; it should not only be regarded as a economic niche within the broad range of tourism activities but encompassing all experiences absorbed by visitors to place beyond their own living environment local need tourism. Tourism takes part in the life and development of the local community, especially in historical centres and can keep cultural and social interest alive. Eco-tourism which began as a left wing offshoot of the adventure travel business is the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry (Mahlbaver, 2005).

Eco- and cultural tourism were focused on values connected to the protection and safeguarding of nature and culture which were clearly dominating the interest of tourism businesses. Today, the diverging interests have been increasingly incorporated by UNWTO and tourism institutions into a holistic approach with a strong focus on tourism business respecting nature and culture (UNESCO, 2010). Cultural attractions is currently viewed as a vehicle for sustainable ecotourism Development is becoming a priority for public policy planners; a part from socio-economic benefits is a potential tool in fighting poverty. Many poor and remote communities are rich in intangible cultural resources and are often near famous heritage sites which if well combined and integrated into ecotourism products can become a powerful tool for reducing poverty levels for such communities. Sustainability of cultural sites as ecotourism destinations is important to ensure successful development in these destinations.

Branding cultural sites as Ecotourism destinations

Branding equity is so valuable and it appears on major marketers balance sheets. Brands have become much more than the products they sell, it is a personality that triggers on the mind of consumers and other stakeholders. The purpose of branding is to achieve consumer perception that will deliver a sustainable competitive advantage to a product or a destination. A study by Kay (2006) suggests that branding of cultural attractions is perceived to be more complex because of peculiarities of cultural attractions compared to conventional services such as banking, education and health. Therefore destination as town, city or a place has one or more attractions for tourists. This may be in the form of scenic sites culture, leisure activities, shopping, rebates, food, and excursion. It is believed that the benefits tourists enjoy from an event are transferred to the host destination (Cai, 2002). When an event is properly branded it has potentials of contributing to the host destination as a future attraction to make the destination unique and even popular to respective visitors (Okungu, Hayombe & Agong, 2014).

A brand is an identifier; it identifies a firm, product or services by the use of name distinctive symbol which differentiate it from other competing firms, products or services in a given market. Kotler & Keller (2009) reckons that branding is an endowing products and services with the power of a brand that is a perceptual entity that is routed in reality, but reflects the perception and perhaps even idiosyncrasies of consumers which is characterised by different approaches some of the common activities involved in branding processes are determining a brand personality brand positioning and brand identifiers (brand drivers).Brand personality refers to the specific mix of human traits that are attributed to a particular product or service. There is a general agreement that a brand is endowed with personalities and that consumers have the tendency of choosing brands whose personality fit their own.

A study by Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2002) suggest four brand personality, this includes sincerity (Down to earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful); excitement (daring) spirited, imaginative and up to date; competence (Reliable, intelligent and successful); ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Kottler & keller (2009) suggest that brand personality can be built on product features, service and image or a combination of any of these. They identified seven common personality traits which include self confidence dominance, autonomy, defence, sociability and adoptability. Brand positioning refers to how the brand is placed in the minds of consumers, positioning takes the images and shows how the brand personality compares to other competing products or service. Brand identifiers or elements are drivers that serve to identify and differentiate the brand. Brand identifiers are categorised into three: Brand (Brand name, logos, symbols, character, spokes people, slogans, jingles, pages, and signage); the product (service and all accompanying activities and supporting marketing programmes); and other associations indirectly transferred to the brand (a person, place or thing).

Hankinson (2004) underscores that brands was once assigned to consumer goods but are now applicable to place and attractions, cultural heritages are destination attractions and inadvertently share some attributes that influence visitors decisions to visit such destinations.

A study by Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005) reports that destination branding as "a set of marketing activities that support the creation of name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination. Consistently conveys the expectations of a memorable travelling experience that is uniquely associated with destinations.

Serves to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination. Branding serves to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice. Cultural heritage are tourist attractions which takes place in tourist destinations. A study by Thompson ,Devis & Mullen (2013) in climate change communications studies of brand (Neuro-markets) gives a brand manager a new evidence of the power of brands that when consumers who are aware of a brand during consumption experience the brain scans revealed significant neurological responses. Brain imaging reveals substantial response to neurological responses between products that were branded in comparison to similar consumption experience in which the consumers were unaware of the brand. Brand in knowledge affects product preference or product choice.

A study by Nowak, Sahli & Sgrro   (2006) observes that positive emotions, product quality, fair pricing, service quality and customer commitment are predictors of brand equity. It is found that all the five attributed to customer commitment with the highest predictor power.

Henderson (2007) in "branding of Singapore" used the following attributes for analysis- product (lots to do, cultural diversity, cosmopolitan, world class infrastructure); delivery(accessibility, efficient, friendly and safe); experience(at ease, stress free, welcome) and end benefit (fulfilling, satisfying, enjoyable, rewarding and enriching). This explains why tourist destinations have put increasing emphasis on promotional and developing a cultural strategy to attract tourists with high appreciation for art, culture and heritage, in other words tourists with a strong accumulation of cultural capital. This perspective attracting and catering for tourists with a high cultural capital will contribute towards the competitiveness and sustainable development of the destination (Throsby, Girard & Nijkap 2007). Cultural sites do not have sufficient brand recognition to compete with other cultural sites as ecotourism destination.

Ecotourism destinations

The label "ecotourism" in the travel industry is akin to a shell game. When researching examples of ecotourism, follow the International Ecotourism Society guidelines to certify that the organization or agency fosters awareness for the environment and cultural practices in the local community. You must distinguish sustainable practices from "green washing," a marketing scheme correlating a convincing association with environmental concerns for an unsustainable service or practice, according to the Dictionary of Sustainable Management. Popular international destinations for ecotourism include Kenya, Palau, Costa Rica; states that foster ecotourism include California, Louisiana and Alaska.According to Scheyvens (2002) Ecotourism involves all types of tourism that focuses on appreciation of nature with environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature and any accompanying cultural features both past and present that promotes conservation with low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

In theory, one of the core concepts of ecotourism is economic benefits to the local communities at the local communities at the destinations sites, but often than not in practice the local community involvement has been reported low with less benefit (Achieng, Hayombe & Agong, 2014).

Honey (2002) points out that real ecotourism is- if properly understood and implemented, a set of principles and practices which can transfer the way people travel with financial benefits for conservation efforts and local people but must also support human rights and democratic movements. Many developing countries, rural populations living around national parks and other ecotourism attractions are locked in contests with the national government and multinational corporations for control of the assets and their benefits. Eco-tourists therefore need to be sensitive to the host country's political environment and social climate and need to consider the merits of international boycotts called for by those supporting democratic reforms, majority rule, and human rights. For example the campaign by the African National Congress (ANC) to isolate South Africa through a boycott of investment, trade, sports and tourism helped bring down apartheid. National Parks and other conservation areas will only survive if there are "happy people" around their perimeters. The local community must be involved with and receive income and other tangible benefits (potable water, roads, health clinics, etc.) from the conservation area and it's tourist facilities. Campsites, lodges, guide services, restaurants and other concessions should be run by or in partnership with communities surrounding a park or other tourist destination.

A study by Hayombe, Agong', Nystrome , Mossbarg, , Malbert, & odede, (2012) suggest that Ecotourism is a tool for rural development, it must also help shift economic and political control to the local community, village, cooperative, or entrepreneur. This is the most difficult and time-consuming principle in the economic equation and the one that foreign operators and "partners" most often let fall through the cracks or that they follow only partially or formally. Ecotourism is not only 'greener' but also less culturally intrusive and exploitative than conventional tourism. Whereas prostitution, black markets and drugs often are by-products of mass tourism, ecotourism strives to be culturally respectful and have a minimal affect on both the natural environment and the human population of a host country. This is not easy, especially since ecotourism often involves travel to remote areas where small and isolated communities have had little experience

interacting with foreigners. And like conventional tourism, ecotourism involves an unequal relationship of power between the visitor and the host and a modification of the relationship through exchange of money. Part of being a responsible eco-tourist is learning beforehand about the local customs, respecting dress codes and other social norms and not intruding on the community unless either invited or as part of a well organized tour.

Theoretical Framework

This study was premised on the Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory which holds that consumers first form expectations of products or services performance prior to purchase or use. Consumers' expectations: confirmed when the product or service matches prior expectation, negatively disconfirmed when a product or service fails to match expectation. It will be jointly guided with Place Branding Theory which is a theory that seeks to improve the reputation of ecotourism destination with potential of economic growth. The theory advanced by Anholt (2007) is applied to places for variety of purposes that include increase of exports, attraction of new investments and diversifications of revenue generation streams of ecotourism destinations. The Place Branding Theory is relevant to the study because it focuses on the promotion of the destination's which is aimed at continuous visitations which is prerequisite to sustainability of ecotourism destinations.

Objective

To determine the extent to which branding affects sustainability of cultural site impressions as ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County.

Research Question

How does branding affect sustainability of cultural site impressions as ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County?

Research Hypotheses

In an attempt to achieve the objective, the research was guided by the null hypotheses that:
Ho_1: The level of branding is similar in all the three sites (Kruskal-Wallis Test was used)
Ho_2: The level of sustainability is similar in all the sites (Kruskal-Wallis Test was used)
Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between branding cultural sites and Sustainability of ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County. Wilcoxon Rank sum test and confirmatory by Chi-square to test Hypothesis in order to predetermine alpha level of significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom ($df = 3$).

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by the following conceptual framework:
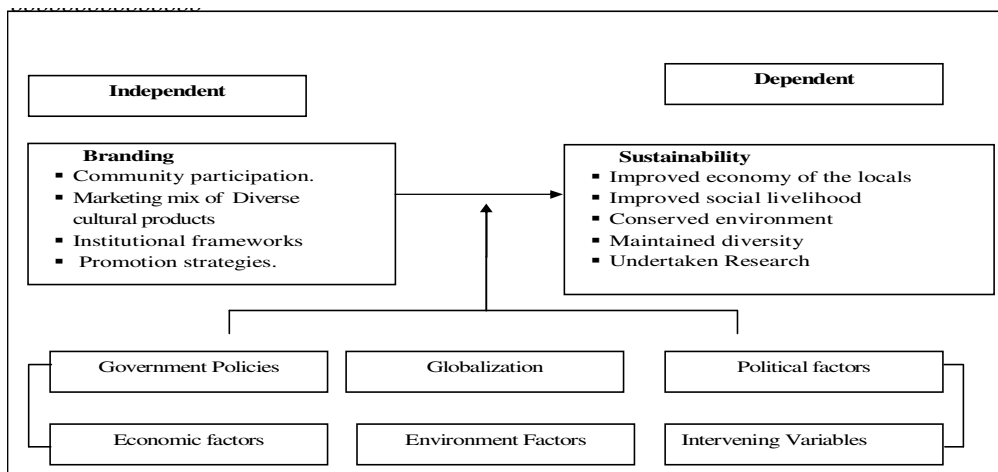

This conceptual framework relates branding of ecotourism destinations to sustainability of the cultural sites; however these relationships may be influenced by government policies, globalization dynamics, economic factors, political factors and environmental factors.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed descriptive embedded case design and a cross - sectional survey to carry out the research in the three selected units of analysis in Kisumu County. An embedded case study is a case with more than one sub-unit of analysis (Yin, 2003). Creswell (2003) submit that a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitude or opinion about a population by studying a sample for generalization with ease to apply in relatively a short period. The study area comprised of Kitmikayi, Abindu and Luanda Magere as indicated in the extract of Kenya map below.
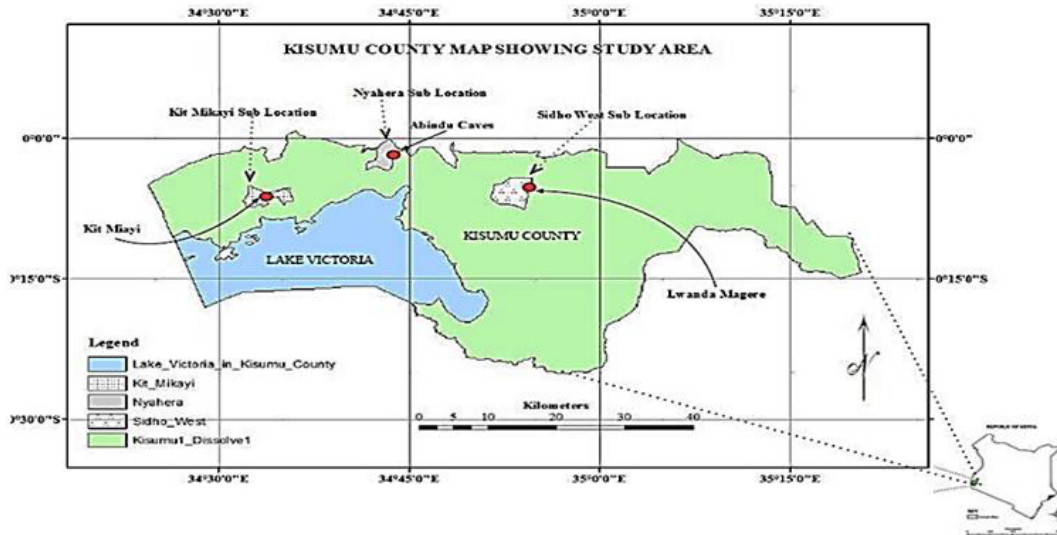
Target Population

The study was carried out among the households in the three selected cultural sites as the target population with a sample size selected through stratified random sampling drawn from the target population of study areas.

Sample Size and Sample Selection

A purposive sampling technique was used to settle on the three sites of study. The study targeted 4792 households in the three sub-locations with sample size of 356 respondents determined by the formula in Fisher et al., (1998) for determining a population that is less than 10,000. The three sites are: Kitmikayi in Seme district, Abindu Caves in Kisumu west district and Lwanda Magere in Wang'aya -1 Muhoroni district

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents in the Sample

Sites	Sub-Locations	Population	Total Population %	Sample Size
Kitmikayi	Kitmikayi	1802	37.6	134
Abindu Caves	"Bar B"	1460	30.5	109
Luanda Magere	Wangaya 1	1530	31.9	114
TOTAL		**4792**	**100.0**	**356**

Sampling Techniques

The study used stratified random sampling procedures to divide the population into geographical subgroups. The samples were stratified according to the numbers of villages in every sub location to ensure representation. By the use of simple

random sampling method in each stratum, a sample of 356 consisting of Households 134 in Kitmikayi, Household 109 in Bar 'B', Households 114 in Wangaya' 1' 114, were selected.

Data collection and Analysis Techniques

A combination of structured and unstructured methodologies was used. Gurthie & Thyne (2006) suggested that unstructured methods be incorporated into the research design at inception stage to elicit information from respondents, data was collected through the use of focus group discussion (FGD) which led to the construction of questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed by the use of descriptive statistical with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to compare the three sites variables branding and sustainability, while Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test of hypothesis was used to determine relationships between branding and sustainability. Since Wilcoxon is a weak nom-parametric test, a confirmatory test was carried out using chi-square test (X^2) of independence to test if there is significant relationship between branding of cultural sites impressions and Sustainability cultural of sites.
Then by comparing the p – value with 0.05 significant levels, we may either accept Ho or reject it. If the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected or otherwise null hypothesis we fail to reject it. Qualitative data were transcribed, organized into various relevant themes and reported as they arrive. (Kothari, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results describe the relationship between branding and sustainbility of cultural sites from the three study areas. The data collected in this research was categorical. The distribution of the population could not be assumed as normal. Further there were only 4 data points. Thus we assumed the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis Test to compare the distribution of more than two populations (Kit-Mikayi, Abindu Caves and Lwanda Magere) since the data came from a continuous distribution.

The null hypothesis: The level of branding is similar in all the three sites was tested through this method and results were as presented in table 2.

	S_1	R_1	S_2	R_2	S_3	R_3
SA	106	(2)	23	(1)	167	(4)
A	690	(12)	443	(9)	487	(10)
D	359	(8)	548	(11)	239	(7)
SD	185	(5)	126	(3)	197	(6)
	$n_1 = 4$		$n_2 = 4$		$n_3 = 4$	

Ranking of the above data yielded the following matrix:

i.   Kitmikayi (R_1) = 2 + 12 + 8 + 5 = 27
ii. Lwanda magere (R_2) = 1 + 9 + 11 + 3 = 24
iii. Abindu Caves (R_3) = 4 + 10 + 7 + 6 = 27

The above, therefore genererates the following relationship:

$$H = \frac{12}{N(N+1)} \Sigma (\frac{R_i^2}{n_i}) - 3(N+1)$$

$$= \frac{12}{12(13)} [(\frac{27^2}{4} + \frac{24^2}{4} + \frac{27^2}{4}) - 3(12+1))]$$

$$= 0.0769[182.5 + 144 + 182.25] - 39$$

Hence, H= 0.115385.

The degrees of freedom are computed as (3 groups-1 = 2) for the three populations. We rejects the null hypothesis that all populations haves the same distribution when H is larger than the critical value. H is approximately chi-square distributed and the critical value at 5% level of significance and 2dfs is 5.991. We fail to reject Ho since H computed is less than the critical value of 5.991. We therefore, accepted the null hypothesis that the level of branding is similar in all the three sites.

H02: The level of sustainability is similar in all the sites, was further tested using Kruskal-Wallis Test and results suggest the following (see table 3):

	S_1	R_1	S_2	R_2	S_3	R_3
SA	22	(2)	0	(1)	28	(3)
A	414	(10)	394	(9)	374	(8)
D	547	(11)	576	(12)	359	(7)
SD	223	(6)	56	(4)	220	(5)
	$n_1 = 4$		$n_2 = 4$		$n_3 = 4$	

Ranking of the above data yielded the following matrix:
i.   Kitmikayi (R_1) = 2 + 10 +118 + 6 = 29
ii.   Lwanda magere (R_2) = 1 + 9 + 12 + 4 = 26
iii.   Abindu Caves (R_3) = 3 + 8 + 7 + 5 = 23

The above, therefore genererates the following relationship:

    Hence, H= 1.25

$X^2_{0.05, 2} = 5.991$
We accept Ho2 since $H_{comm} < H_{crit}$
These results indicate that there is no significant difference in the level of sustainability among the cultural sites. The two tests of Kruskal Wallis Test show that the three different sites require similar efforts in improving branding and sustainability.

For the third hypothesis

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between branding cultural sites and Sustainability of ecotourism destinations in Kisumu County, Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was carried out to determine the relationship. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test is used to test for a difference between two samples. It is the nonparametric counterpart to the two-sample Z or t test. Instead of comparing two population means, we compare two population medians.

A SRS of size n1 is drawn from population 1, and then an independent SRS of size n2 from population 2. So the total number of observations is N = n1 + n2. The next step in this test is to rank our set of observations. Working with ranks instead of numerical outcomes, allows us to abandon specific assumptions about the shape of the distribution.
The sum of the ranks of the first sample is W, the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test statistic. If one sample is truly bigger than the other, we'd expect its ranks to be higher than the others. So after we have ranked all of the observations, we sum up the ranks for each of the two samples and we can then compare the two rank sums. If there is no difference between our two samples and our sample sizes are equal, then we'd expect

$$W = \frac{N(N+1)}{4}$$

The results yields: W=17.

For a two tailed test, the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test for independence of samples with n1=n2=4 has critical values: W_l=11 and W_u=25. Since the computed W = 17 We fail to reject H_{O3} at 5% level of significance. This impies that there is a relationship between the two samples.

Table 4. Test results illustrating the relationship between branding and sustainbility of cultural sites

	OBSERVED FREQUENCY				
SITES	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
C	296	1620	1146	508	3570
D	50	1182	1482	499	3213
Total	346	2802	2628	1007	6783
	EXPECTED FREQUENCY				
SITES	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
C	182.1053	1474.737	1383.158	530.000	3570.000
D	163.8947	1327.263	1244.842	477.000	3213.000
Total	346.000	2802.000	2628.000	1007.000	6783.000

Since Wilcoxon is a weak non-parametric test, a confimatory test using x^2 at 5% level of significance with 3df was caried. The P-value was 6.98 E-58, which is much less that 0.05. The hypothesis in this case
H_O: There is sigificant relationship between branding and sustainability. We reject H_O and conclude that branding determines sustainabiliy of cultural sites as ecotourism destinations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that the three cultural sites are at the same level of branding and sustainability and they require even inputs of branding resources for sustainability, enhance community participations and supports for local ecotourism destinations through financial plough back and capacity building through trainings. The study established that branding is a significant factor in sustainability of ecotourism destinations where the main conditions for sustainability of ecotourism destinations are appropriate planning practices, a systematic execution of plans in addition to increasing stakeholder involvement. There is a need to evaluate the role of the two tier governments by comparing their input in branding ecotourism destinations for sustainable livelihood of the local communities in Kenya.

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