

Influence of Affective Destination Brand Image on Wildlife Park Attractiveness: A Case Study of the Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem, Kenya

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Abstract: In Kenya, previous studies have focused more on the relationship between management and branding of wildlife parks, ignoring factors like competing strategies and other study variables that could be important, global research has focused on wildlife-based tourism and ecosystems. The Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem under investigation has the greatest coverage of protected areas for wildlife protection in Kenya, but despite the potential for socio-economic contribution, its performance is still below the optimum level due to the low number of tourists hence revenue. The primary objective of the study was to assess the role of affective destination brand image on the attractiveness of wildlife parks in the Amboseli- Tsavo Ecosystem. Simple random sampling was employed to select the sample of 440 park visitors and 28 tourism experts. Data collected was analyzed through descriptive statistics while multi linear regression analysis was conducted to verify the constructs underlying adopted scales. The outcome revealed a significant positive relationship was established between affective destination image and park attractiveness ($\beta = 0.653$, $t = 12.792$, $p = .000$). The results establish how relevant the affective destination brand image is to enhancing attractiveness of the wildlife parks. Findings of this study might be essential to policymakers on matters related to developing and marketing wildlife parks in Kenya.

Keywords- Wildlife conservation, branded parks, tourism destination, Wildlife attractions

1. INTRODUCTION

Wildlife tourism is eco-friendly, animal-friendly tourism that usually features wildlife in their natural habitat. The most basic aspect of wildlife tourism is observing wildlife in its natural habitat. Wildlife tourism, in its most basic form, is the observation of wild creatures in their natural habitat. Holiday to destinations of wildlife interests is an important component of Kenya's and a

number of other countries' tourism businesses. It has seen remarkable and quick expansion in recent years around the world, and it is strongly related to ecotourism and sustainable tourism, (Irungu *et al.* 2022). Tourism is a contributing sector of the economy that provides tailored holiday packages and trips. The Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem under investigation has the greatest coverage of wildlife-protected areas; nonetheless, its performance remains below optimal due to a low number of visitors, despite the potential for socioeconomic contribution, (Owiti-Otieng'a *et al.* 2022).

According to Maingi *et al.*, (2014), Kenya has a distinct destination brand image thanks to its premier wildlife parks, which provide high-end tourists with unique experiences. Kenya must contend with fierce competition from other African nations that offer comparable tourism services, such as the Republic of South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Namibia, and Botswana (Christie *et al.*, 2013). Approximately 8% of Kenya's land mass is covered by 23 national parks, 4 national sanctuaries, 4 marine national parks, 6 marine national reserves, and 28 national reserves, according to Kameri-Mbote *et al.*, (2018) and Nyariki and Amwata (2019). These form the most extensive protected areas in Kenya, with majority under management of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) (Muhumuza& Balkwill, 2013).

According to Dupeyras and MacCallum (2013), a tourist destination's appeal should be evaluated in terms of its past, present, and future. Every tourist attraction competes with one another for tourists in Kenya, with wildlife safaris being the most popular vacation option. A tourist destination's appeal can ultimately be attributed to the policy responses and economic prospects that can be fostered by the stakeholders' and the destination's brand image. Despite its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) tourism activities lead to the high number of overnight stays in lodging facilities, an increased consumption of other tourism and hospitality products and services for both local and international markets. all examples of performance indicators of effective application of marketing strategies at a destination.

Destination attractiveness, according to (Ariya *et al.*, 2017) is a tourist's feelings, beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, or perceptions of specific destination features or aspects that influence a tourist's decision regarding which spot to visit. He also found that dynamic evaluations of location and attribute judgments result in the overall or global attraction. Based on the study's findings and a review of the literature, tourism destination attractiveness will be defined as the perceived value of wildlife destination attributes in terms of satisfying tourists' criteria and ambitions. The affective component of the brand image is produced based on the characteristics of each individual. The affective image attribute makes tourists emotional reactions or evaluations of the destination (Hallmann *et al.*, 2012). By defining destination image as the totality of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a destination can elicit in the minds of potential and actual tourists, Della Corte and Micera (2011) emphasize that destination image is pivotal in the actual demand for a

destination and not just in the minds of potential tourists in 2007. Destinations with recognizable identities and favorable tourist impressions are more likely to be picked, necessitating effective destination management. Additionally, post-visit perceptions of the destination impact visitors' feelings of pleasure, their desire to return, and their word-of-mouth advertising to friends and family.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As Kenya strategizes to be a leading long-haul holiday destinations in Africa, there is a need to continue transforming wildlife parks as unique tourism destination products to meet the high-end and diverse visitor experience. The desire to experience the wild drives wildlife tourism the most (Suntikul *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Maingi *et al.*, (2014) stated that branded parks in Kenya have received much attention for their wildlife-based tourism offerings but yet to reach their full potential. According to Jin and Sparks (2016), travel trade partners, who form the backbone of the tourism products' distribution channel, concentrate more on branded parks in their tour itineraries with limited attention to the unbranded parks. Further, the branded parks become more appealing because of the brand image within the Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem. However, not all parks can secure enough visitors and generate the projected revenue.

The parks under study perform below par compared to other conservation areas such as Nakuru National Park or Maasai Mara National Reserve (GoK, 2022), yet they have the potential. However, market diversification needs to be created to reposition the ecosystem as a leading tourism destination. The low performance of tourism destinations can be attributed to high charges, failure in product differentiation and failure by the stakeholders to focus on the right market that can enjoy the available products and services, as illustrated by Matolo *et al.*, (2021). Therefore, a critical analysis of the role of affective destination brand image on the attractiveness of the branded parks in the Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem is necessary, hence the subject of the study.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Behavioral learning theory

Peter and Nord introduced the theory 1980 to examine behaviour modification perspectives on marketing (Peter& Nord, 1982). In 1981 Michael Rothchild, an associate professor of business, defined behaviour learning theory as the paradigm typically used when a layperson discusses behaviour modification (Harrison & Jara-Moroni, 2015). Rothschild suggests that this theory may also be called operant conditioning from Fredrick Skinner's work in 1953, instrumental conditioning, behaviourism or behaviour modification. Rothschild addresses five key elements of the behavioural learning paradigm pertinent to marketing in his work on an extended understanding of behavioural

learning theory. Several behavioral theories have been described in recent study under the 'Behavior Modification Perspective on Marketing.' According to Lind (2018), behavioral learning occurs when response behavior causes the appearance of a stimulus. Marketers are familiar with this paradigm; the marketing concept exemplifies its foundations by stating that a transaction takes place when a consumer receives a product (a stimulus) and engages in purchasing behavior or response. Customers are more likely to repeat behavior (visit the park again) if the product is appealing (e.g., fits needs), as the park in the study is in this case. Positive reinforcement for desired conduct is vital since the key to effective marketing is recurrent purchase behaviour. Reinforcement within the tourism industry is implemented in tours and travel companies offering different services to tourists. The concepts of behavioural learning theory adopted in this study assisted in understanding the relationship between destination brand image and a park's attractiveness to viable customers.

3.1.2 Motivation Theory

Motivation theory was first explained by Maslow in 1954. It was later explained in 1985 by Dr Ernest Ditcher. According to Ditcher, the image gives more details or data of a product. Furthermore, the image may be distorted hence missing to achieve intended objective. He elaborated this concept by giving an example of an actor or politician who can change their outlook by simply putting on glasses. The image changes, but the person remains the same. The motivation of tourists is discussed by Simkova and Holzner (2014), along with the use of existing theoretical models of motivation in rural tourism. It has been studied how motivation affects behavior and decision-making regarding employment, sport, travel, and other leisure activities. Madden *et al.*, (2016) posit that having the image under control has been a central marketing research challenge. Therefore, the decision-travel maker's habits and preferences depend on internal and external elements, such as personality, learning, motives, attitudes, and perceptions. External factors include reference groups, families, socioeconomic classes, and cultures. An individual's internal wants cause tension or discomfort, and they attempt to behave in order to release the tension (Chen *et al.*, 2014). Osabiya (2015) suggests that it has to do with material benefits, including pay and perks, safety, advancement, service agreements, the office setting, and terms of employment. These are the things that must be done to or for individuals to inspire them.

Furthermore, Madden *et al.*, (2016) suggested that motivation theory explains destination image. They adopted it to logically look into the literature in order to develop an appropriate framework for understanding the formation of destination images by foreign tourists. In their study, they explain that destination image can be explained in two ways, i.e., by the internal motivation of the tourists or the external motivation emanating from the holiday destination. The findings of the study also indicated that the existing theories in tourism do not consider some modern variables, such as perceived risks of travelling and the power of social networks among the target market that fuel word of mouth. Consumer and buyer

behaviour research agree that product or service image is vital. Over the years, the chief goal of all consumer behaviour research has been the choice of a service or product thus this theory assisted in explaining tourist behaviour on the choice of Amboseli Tsavo ecosystem for wildlife tourism.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 illustrates the study's conceptual framework, showing the independent variables (affective destination brand image) and the dependent variables (park attractiveness).

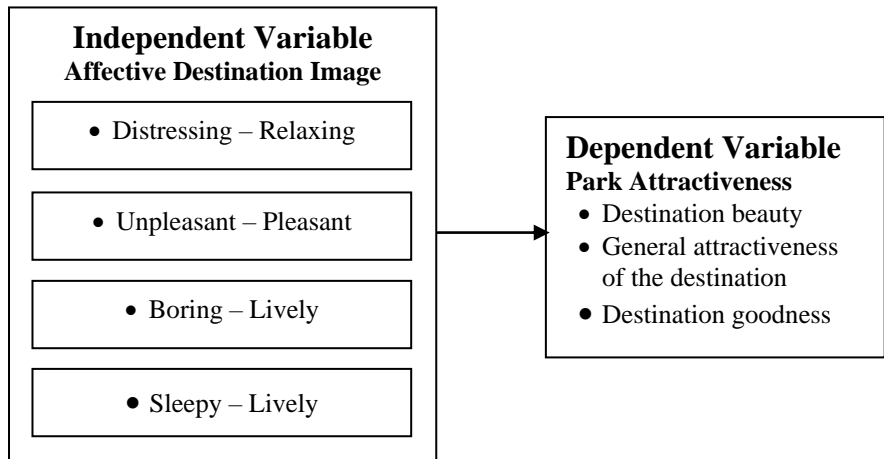


Figure 1. 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Adopted and Modified from Affective Destination Image Scale (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Wang & Hsu, 2010),

3.3 Review of Empirical Literature

Despite the fact that affective component has gotten less emphasis in the study, it is vital to improving tourists' perceptions of the destination image. This component of destination brand image looks into the feelings towards physical attributes at a destination and its environs (Setiawan et al., 2021). Alcocer and Ruiz (2019) study concentrated on an archaeological heritage site with the purpose of investigating the construction of the destination image as well as the impact of this image on tourist satisfaction in Spain. They collected data using a closed-ended questionnaire issued to travelers aged 18 and up, which was then analyzed using the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (P.L.S.-S.E.M) technique. According to the findings, the affective component of the tourist's impression of this site is more relevant than the cognitive component. The results of the study revealed that the destination image increases visitor satisfaction, further indicating that someone visiting a location is strongly linked to the image of the tourist destination visited, especially for those who are making repeat visits, (Culic, 2021).

The affective destination image, according to Prayag *et al.*, (2017), is a major influencer of attitude and behavior. Their research on a heritage site with distinct archaeological and cultural features found that tourists' emotional experiences (as measured by the three dimensions of emotions which are joy, positive surprise, and love) influence their perception of the destination image, and their judgment of that image influences their satisfaction. However, the third dimension, pleasurable surprise, has no effect. Balakrishnan and Sambasivan (2022) wanted to see how the COVID-19 epidemic affected people's perceptions of their destinations in terms of cognitions, emotions, commitment to their destinations, and ownership of those destinations. As a result of their research findings, there are more statistically significant connections between psychological ownership of a destination and its affective image and travel intent even during COVID-19. Destination attachment influenced destination image through conceptualizing and analyzing historical brand equity components such as awareness, image, quality, and value, as well as foreign tourists' inclinations to return.

Ranasinghe *et al.*, (2019) opined that visitor satisfaction plays a key role in success of tourism business. Another important factor influencing the park experience is quantity and quality. A large number of park visitors have minimum knowledge of the park's features and want aid in learning about the distinctions between one geographical or historical area and another, the length of the routes, the types of facilities, and so on. A number of park visitors take into account the quantity of trails, vistas, and experiences available in the national park. Visitors are constantly considering what they can do with the amenities. They are seeking park activities in which they can take part. Maingi *et al.*, (2015) sought to investigate the market profiling and positioning of park branding in Kenya. They adopted a descriptive design and focused on four protective areas within the central touristic circuit. Their findings showed that relatively younger visitors were attracted to Hell's Gate National Park than Aberdare National Park. The results were thought to result from activities undertaken in the parks. Hell's Gate Park included youthful activities such as rock climbing, cycling and walking. These rather created a physical youth demanding sport more than older people.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted an embedded research design to collect, analyze, and interpret the results. The embedded research design is a mixed methods approach in which one data collection (for example, qualitative) serves as a supplement to a study that is predominantly focused on quantitative data (Creswell *et al.*, 2003).

This study embedded a qualitative component within a quantitative design, with the qualitative data supporting the quantitative results.

4.2 Study Area

The Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem was studied as part of the Southern Kenya tourist circuit. Three branded national parks are located within the ecosystem: Amboseli, Tsavo East, and Tsavo West. Amboseli National Park, which covers around 392 square kilometers, was established in 1974 within Kajiado County. The Amboseli National Park is roughly 240 kilometers from Nairobi, near the Kenya-Tanzania border.

4.3 Target Population

Ndivo (2013) describes the target group of the study as well-defined participants with comparable features who are anticipated to give the researcher information from which one can draw definitive conclusions about the greater community. The target population consisted of 444 visitors to the branded parks, 54 managers of tourism businesses, and 28 tourism professionals who work in or around the national parks under study.

4.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

This study used stratified, convenient, and purposeful sampling techniques. To select the park visitors, a stratified sampling technique was used to generate strata based on the branded parks, which yielded three strata—Amboseli, Tsavo West, and Tsavo East. In each stratum, a convenience sampling technique was used to select the required proportion of the sample size of park visitors. The study employed Yamane’s (1967) formula to compute the sample of park visitors as follows;

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

Which is valid where **n** is the sample size, **N** is the population size, and **e** is the desired level of precision at a 95% confidence level (5%). Thus,

$$n = \frac{334,334}{[1 + 334,334(0.05)^2]} \cong 400$$

Consequently, the required sample size for this study was 400 park visitors. In addition, 10% (n = 40) of the sample size was added to cater for the non-response bias associated with a questionnaire survey (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Therefore, this study’s final required sample size was 440 park visitors distributed, as presented in the table below

Table 4.1. Sample Size Determination

National Park	Average Population	Percentage of Proportion (%)	Required Sample Size
Amboseli	140,867	42.1	185
Tsavo West	53,467	16.0	71
Tsavo East	140,000	41.9	184
Total	334,334	100.0	440

In addition, managers of tourism enterprises were selected using the convenience sampling technique, while a purposeful sampling technique was used to select tourism experts as key informants for the interviews.

4.5 Data Collection Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to measure respondents' cognitive destination brand image of Amboseli-Tsavo as a holiday destination. A multidimensional scale developed by Styliadis *et al.*, (2017) grounded on previous studies (i.e., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008) was used to measure. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition a semi-structured interview guide was used to collect text data from the key study informants. The guide was designed to collect general information from the interviewees and information about national parks' attractiveness.

4.6 Pretesting the Research Instruments

The semi-structured questionnaire targeting the park visitors was pretested to examine its usability. The questionnaire was pretested with 42 park visitors representing approximately 10% of the sample size, as suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). An equal number (n=14) of park visitors were selected from each branded park. Furthermore, the interview guide for tourism experts was pre-tested with four experts drawn from the national government, county government, park warden, and tourism associations, representing 14.3% of the sample size of all key informants.

4.7 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

Validity refers to how well a research instrument measures what it is intended for (Kothari, 2012). This study used a content validity technique to gauge the validity of the questionnaires and interview guides. This technique was ascertained through several instruments' reviews by the research supervisors and tourism experts. This study used Cronbach's α to examine the reliability of the measures used in the questionnaires. According to Vogt (1999), Cronbach's α ranges from 0.000 (indicating no reliability) to 1.000 (demonstrating perfect reliability), with higher Cronbach's α depicting the internal consistency of the measurement. A Cronbach's α of at least higher than 0.700 is considered acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 1998). A Cronbach's α tests was performed for the park visitors' questionnaire (Table 4.2).

Table 4. 2. Results of Reliability Test for the Park Visitor's Questionnaire

Measurement	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Affective destination image	4	0.86

For this study, as shown in Table 4.2 Cronbach’s α coefficient was 0.86 demonstrating that all measurements were reliable for data analysis and reporting (Hair et al., 2014).

4.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

4.8.1 Qualitative data analysis

The quantitative data analysis procedure included several steps. First, the completed Google Forms surveys were downloaded into Microsoft Excel, and the data was checked for accuracy. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) v.25.0 software was applied to analyze the data in this study. The Microsoft Excel files were imported into SPSS v.25.0 for data analysis. Second, to investigate the missing data, data cleaning with frequencies was performed. Third, new variables (aggregate of measurement items for each construct) were computed to modify the data. Fourth, to summarize the sample characteristics of park visitors, a descriptive analysis using frequencies and percentages was performed. Means and standard deviations were also utilized to summarize the respondents’ replies to various metrics. Further, linear regression analysis to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Table 4. 3. Summary of Data Analysis Methods

Objective	Hypothesis	Analysis Method	Statistical Model	Decision Rule
To assess the influence of affective destination image on park attractiveness in the Amboseli-Tsavvo Ecosystem	<i>H₀₁</i> : Affective image does not significantly influence park attractiveness in Amboseli-Tsavvo Ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive statistics • Multiple linear regression 	$\hat{y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$ Where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \hat{y} = Predicted Park attractiveness • X_1 = Cognitive image • X_2 = Affective image • X_3 = Conative image • β_0 = Model constant • β_1 = Regression slope for X_1 • β_2 = Regression slope for X_2 • β_3 = Regression slope for X_3 	Reject <i>H₀₂</i> when β_2 value is statistically significant ($p < .05$)

4.8.2 Quantitative data analysis

For the qualitative data, inductive analysis was used to analyze the data using thematic analysis. During the qualitative analysis process, all the completed interviews were coded to easily identify the excerpts to be used while reporting the findings in the succeeding chapter. In this study, the coding consisted of allocating numbers to completed interviews, followed by the category of the key informant, followed by a code indicating that the participant was a tourism expert. For instance, for Participant #10, NGTE was used to mean a participant whose interview was the tenth to be completed and who was a national

government tourism expert. The results of quantitative data analyses are reported and presented in graphs, charts, and tables.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Response Rate

A total of 440 questionnaires were issued to park visitors, 325 of which were returned. 50 returned questionnaires were deleted due to missing data, leaving 275 viable questionnaires for data analysis and a response rate of 62.5%. 42 questionnaires were provided to tourist stakeholders, 37 of which were returned. Seven of these questions were deleted due to inadequate data, leaving 30 useful questionnaires for data analysis and reporting with a 71.4% response rate. Finally, in terms of key informants, this study targeted 24 interviewees, 21 of whom completed interviews, representing an 87.5% success rate.

5.2 Demographic Information

The demographic information of this study comprised of: gender, age and education qualifications of the respondents

5.2.1 Gender

Most (53.9%) of visitors to the Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem were female, with male visitors accounting for 46.1% (Figure 5.1).

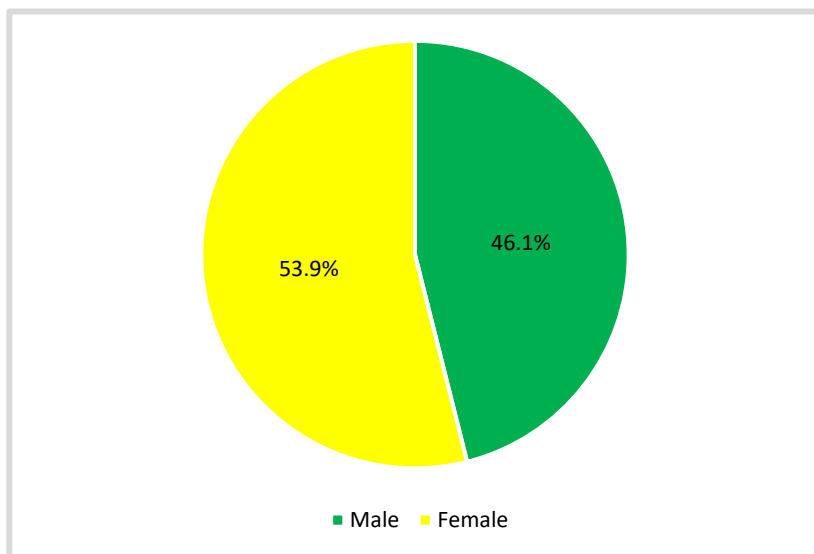


Figure 5. 1. Distribution of visitors by gender

5.2.2 Age

The results of the distribution of visitors by age are illustrated in Figure 5.2.

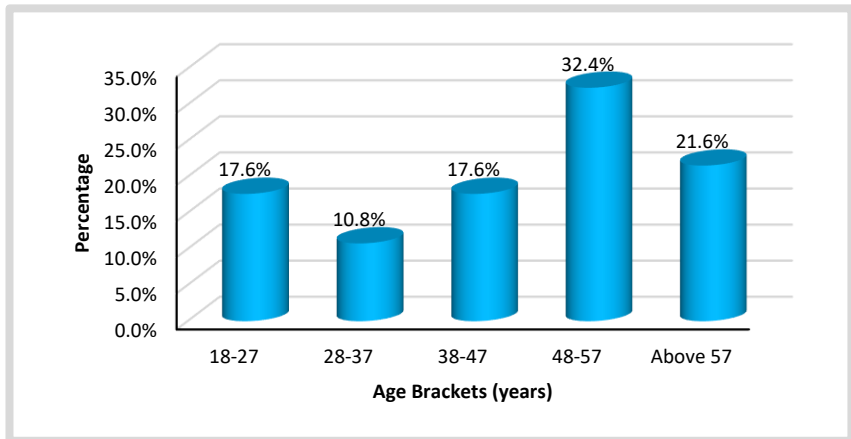


Figure 5. 2. Distribution of visitors by age

5.2.3 Education Qualifications

Outcome in Figure 4.3 show that the majority (47.1%) of respondents in this study were holders of undergraduate degree qualifications, followed by those with a master's degree (19.6%), certificate (10.8%), doctorate (6.9%), diploma (5.9%), high-school (4.9%), and post-doctorate degree (2.9%), respectively. Only 2.0% of all the respondents in this study were holders of primary school certificates.

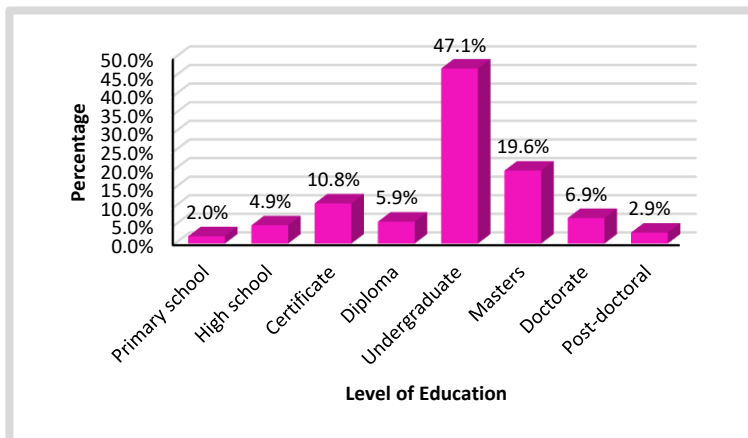


Figure 5. 3. Distribution of visitors by education qualifications

5.3 Affective destination image

The respondents were requested to show their level of agreement or disagreement with several characteristics used to describe the affective destination of the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem as a tourist destination (Table 5.4).

Table 5. 4: Descriptive Statistics of Affective Destination Image

Observed Variables	M±SD	Interpretation
Affective destination image	3.94±0.60	Positive
Distressing – Relaxing	3.72±0.85	Positive
Unpleasant – Pleasant	4.23±0.78	Admirable
Boring – Exciting	3.47±0.87	Positive
Sleepy – Lively	4.10±0.89	Positive

Notes: $n=275$. M-Mean. SD-Standard Deviation. Scale: Likert-type (Mean Classification): 1 = Strongly Disagree (1.00 – 1.80), 2=Disagree (1.80 – 2.60), 3=neither Agree nor Disagree (2.60 – 3.40), 4=Agree (3.40 – 4.20), 5=Strongly Agree (4.20 – 5.00)

As shown in Table 5.4, the respondents assessed the parks in the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem as relaxing ($M = 3.72, SD = 0.85$), pleasant ($M = 4.23, SD = 0.78$), exciting ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.87$), and lively ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.89$). The overall affective destination image among the respondents was positive ($M = 3.94, SD = 0.60$).

5.4 Conclusion

The objective of the current study sought to assess the influence of affective destination image on park attractiveness, which was addressed through H_{01} . As indicated in Table 4.13(iii), a significant positive relationship was established between affective destination image and park attractiveness ($\beta = 0.653, t = 12.792, p = .000$). Therefore, H_{01} was rejected. Inferring from the results, tourists experiencing higher levels of the affective destination image are more likely to perceive the tourist destination as attractive, and vice versa. These results were consistent with previous studies (Alcocer and Lopez, 2020; Culic, 2021; Ariya et al., 2021; Ranasinghe et al., 2019).

According to the study's findings, the presence of sufficient lodging, accessibility, attractions, amenities, and activities demonstrates a positive affective destination brand image. Friendly service fees and persuasive promotional efforts are important factors in travelers' choice of destinations. According to the study, most visitors believe that the parks have strong infrastructure and road signage that prevent them from getting lost in the wilderness and that they have a high perception of the destination brand image of the parks under consideration. Additionally, the findings showed that park visitors thought they were getting their money's worth. Providing high-quality goods and services encourages visitors to have favorable opinions of the parks as a whole.

5.5 Recommendation

According to the results of the study and the discussions on the specific objective, tourism products are created to attract potential visitors to the destination. The destination becomes favourable for holidays if it can offer the five key components of tourism, names; - suitable accommodation, accessibility, attraction, activities and amenities at an affordable price to the target market. However, this study recommends a policy of controlling the provision of accommodation and attractions or activities within the protected parks to safeguard the ecosystem. The policy can also look into the spatial distribution of tourism activities and proper land use to avoid any derogation of the natural environment.

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