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Abstract

Events are crucial for development of destinations across different parts of the world since they possess important social, cultural, and economic outputs. International celebrity events provide additional destination attraction and they create a sustainable tourism industry across many parts of the world. Despite research in recent times in events gaining tremendous interest among scholars and emerging as a crucial area of study, little is known on how international celebrity events hosting influences tour firms' performance. This study explored the role of international celebrity events destination promotion on tour firms' performance in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study. The sample size of the study constituted of 390 managerial employees who were drawn from all the 329 tour firms registered with the Kenya Association of Tour Operators. Stratified, systematic, purposive, and convenient sampling approaches were used to sample the respondents, while questionnaires and interview schedules were used for collection of data. Results showed that the international celebrity events destination promotion depicted a positive and statistically significant relationship with tour firms performance ($p=0.000<0.05$). The study recommends development and hosting of special international celebrity events in the country by event organizers as the basis of increasing the competitiveness of Nairobi City County as a preferred tourist destination.

Keywords: *International Celebrity Events Destination Promotion, Image, Hosting, Tour Firms, Performance, Competitiveness*

1. Introduction

The benefits of the tourism industry are increasingly becoming monumental across different parts of the globe (Guccio, Lisi, Martorana, & Mignosa, 2017). In its present form, tourism keeps on developing without respite in most areas of the world. The tourism industry is responsible for creation of a significant number of job opportunities, including its role in driving exports and generating wealth (Yilmaz & Aslan, 2017). As noted by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2018), this sector was responsible for 9.9% of all employment in 2017 by accounting for 313 million jobs, an equivalent of 10.4% of global GDP.

Increased discretionary income and leisure time constituted some of the core reasons that prompted increase in events (Karl & Schmude, 2017). Realization of events by governments as meaningful activities that had the prospect of producing positive effects became apparent in the 1980s. Consequently, participation and interest in events has developed exponentially over time, peaking at the start of the twenty-first century. Events hosting is becoming more crucial since it has demonstrated its ability to develop tourism, education, urban regeneration, arts, and culture (Houdement, Santos, & Serra, 2017). Growth in international tourism has been made possible by the expanding role of event tourism (Petrovic, Lakicevic, & Durkalic, 2019). Moreover, events contribute to a sustainable tourism sector as well as improve a destination's attraction features (Getz & Page, 2016). Events offer a competitive edge for destinations hosting them and they are necessary for future tourism development plans.

Celebrity events have had a substantial influence on the economic performance of different countries. Events serve primarily as image-makers, place marketers, animators, catalysts, and attractions for destinations (Fredline & Jin, 2017). Events brand prospective destinations by performing roles, such as co-branding partner, as a vital component of the brand, or as a brand extension (Getz & Page, 2016). Events, such as sporting, cultural, business, and political, continue to enhance a destination's competitiveness and development through marketing (Waller, Trendafilova, & Daniell, 2014; OECD, 2017). Destinations use celebrities attending events to promote their domestic and international tourism markets (Lee & Yoo, 2015). Celebrity exposure by global media helps to shape the image of the host town or city and hence, aid creation of positive perceptions of destinations.

Nairobi City County provides a wide range of man-made, natural, ecological and biophysical heritage that form its core tourist attractions. The County is a key destination choice of international events, which directly influence performance of tour firms. Notably, 191 international conference events were held in Nairobi in 2017, whereas 227 took place in 2016 (Economic Survey, 2018). Kenya developed a National Strategy on Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE), as one of the country's vision 2030-flagship projects to offer unique visitor experiences (Kenya Vision 2030, 2018).

In the recent past scholars (for example, Oklobdzija, 2015; Getz & Page, 2016; Seraphin & Gowreesunkar, 2017) have developed interest in studying events, which have created numerous opportunities for tourism growth for the last 20 years, and their importance continues to expand every day. Notwithstanding the size of events, they have been acknowledged globally as essential for tourism, and they have become predominantly imperative for both marketing and development of tourism destinations (Milohnic, Licul, & Andjelic, 2016). Changes in needs and demands of visitors, including the increasing number of individuals involved in tourism, have made it necessary for diversification of tourism products. Substitute forms of tourism, like mega celebrity events, carry out a significant role in a destination's development (Komurcu, Boz, & Tukelturk, 2014). Kenya's tourism sector has faced challenges because of its over-reliance on wildlife and beach as core attractions, areas that are susceptible to seasonality and constant competition from other countries and therefore, the need for tourism diversification into events.

Despite the importance of the tourism sector being on the rise as a vital industry, little information is available on how to leverage international celebrity events hosting in destinations as a key enabler for tourism growth and competitiveness. Accordingly, this study aimed to bridge the identified gaps by examining the role of international celebrity events destination promotion on tour firms' performance in Nairobi City County.

2. Methodology

The study used a cross-sectional research design where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized (Greenfield & Greener, 2016). The independent variable of the study was international celebrity events destination promotion whose indicators were publicity, quality, and image (Mxunyelwa & Mangisa, 2018). The dependent variable of the study was tour firms' performance, which constituted of revenue increment and increase in online bookings as proxy measurements (Gupta, 2011). The study area for this research work was Nairobi City County, which is a leading tourism hub in Kenya (GOK, 2017).

The target population comprised of managerial employees of tour firms registered by KATO in Nairobi City County. Despite limited information on the number of employees per a tour firm, a report by KATO (2019) states that there is an average of 10 managerial employees for category A, B, and C tour companies, whereas category D and E have 5 and 3 managerial personnel respectively. Thus, the target population constituted of 2,100 respondents drawn from all the 329 firms registered by KATO in Nairobi City County. Moreover, the study targeted 10 tourism professionals and experts drawn from the Kenyatta International Convention Center, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), Kenya Tourism Fund (KTF), Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, and Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers Caterers (KAHC).

The first step was to identify the firms based on categorization of the tour firms as registered by KATO. The next stage involved proportional sampling of KATO registered tour firms since each category has a different number of firms. Proportional sampling was done using Fischer's

formula. Random sampling was then used to identify study respondents (390 managerial employees). To select the 10 key informants for interviews, purposive sampling was used. To enhance methodological triangulation, structured questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data from the respondents (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006).

3. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of international celebrity events destination promotion on tour firms' performance in Nairobi City County. Inferential statistics were used to establish the relationship between international celebrity events destination promotion and tour firms' performance. A regression model was fitted to the data on celebrity events destination promotion and tour firms' performance. The model fit statistics indicated in Table 1 indicate that international celebrity events destination promotion accounted for 8.3% ($R^2=0.083$) variation in tour firms performance whereas 91.7% of the changes were caused by factors outside the scope of this research work.

Table 1: Model Fit

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.288	.083	.079	.97040

ANOVA statistics in Table 2 show that the model used to establish the relationship between international celebrity events destination promotion and tour firms performance was statistically significant as supported by the F-statistics equal to 24.907 and the p-value equal to $0.00 < 0.05$.

Table 2: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.455	1	23.455	24.907	.000
Residual	259.904	276	.942		
Total	283.359	277			

The null hypothesis (H_0) of the study was specified as:

H_0 : *There is no significant relationship between international celebrity events destination promotion and tour firms' performance in Nairobi City County.*

Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the above null hypothesis where the criterion for rejecting it was set at the calculated t value being greater than the critical value of 1.96. The results from the simple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.813	.248		11.324	.000
Destination Promotion	.308	.062	.288	4.991	.000

Based on the findings in Table 3, international celebrity events destination promotion and tour firms performance showed a positive and significant relationship ($r=0.308$, $p=0.000$). The calculated t-value of 4.991 was greater than the critical value of 1.96 and thus, rejection of this hypothesis. In effect, there is a significant relationship between international celebrity events destination choice and tour firms performance in Nairobi City County.

From the interviews, tourism experts and professionals noted that international celebrity events promoted the profile of Nairobi City County as a potential destination and indirectly generated interest among the prospective tourists. Moreover, there are those who hinted that events shaped the attitude of viewers about host countries and thus, prompted the intention to visit by communicating the image of destinations. For instance, a tourism professional stated that,

“Events influence the image of the destination, generate pre and post event demand and support a wide variety of products.”

Another tourism expert acknowledged that international celebrity events destination promotion created opportunities for tour firms to undertake product innovations to match with those in other destinations across the globe. The interviewee recounted that international celebrity event destination promotion led to economic growth of the country by first generating income for tour firms. To put this into perspective, the tourism expert stated that;

“International celebrity events destination promotion supports product innovations by tour firms. They promote growth and income generation for the tour firms.”

Many tourism boards across the world are increasingly using celebrities as strategic means of promoting their countries and cities as potential tourist destinations (Musgrave & Okech, 2011; Oklobdžija, 2015). Celebrities attending events promote cities by personifying them with the intent of influencing tourist visits. Starting the 1980s, events emerged as one of the promising activities that had the prospect of producing positive effects in destinations (Karl & Schmude, 2017). The results from this study are in tandem with much of extant literature on events’ destination promotion and sustainable tourism development. For instance, Kim, Kang, and Kim (2014) averred that mega sport events affected the image of destinations and argued that the host country’s image was important for influencing greater tourist visits and strengthening of its

brand and product offering, two critical components that culminated in economic benefits. Similarly, Mxunyelwa and Mangisa (2018) viewed sport events as incentives for image building and promotion of destinations where they positioned destinations on international tourism blueprint.

Hanafiah *et al.* (2016) averred that special events promote destination, make them more attractive, and increase their ability to attract visitors, an outcome that increases the chances of tourists revisiting a destination. Results from a study by Candrea and Ispas (2013) showed that hosting of the Olympic Festival differentiated the tourism product and enhanced the image of the destination. Consequently, destination image can be influenced by the hosting of events and the positive and quality attributes associated with the event.

Whilst no systematic study has shown that events destination promotion has no role in sustainable tourism development and the overall performance of tourism organizations, some studies seem to have arrived at inconclusive results on this thematic area. Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2019) analysed the implication of using non-mega events for destination branding and concluded that challenges exist in the objectives of the stakeholders to leverage sport events in branding destinations. In fact, ineffective partnerships among private and public entities acted as a bottleneck towards effective collaboration to take advantage of sport events in destination branding. Moreover, Heere *et al.* (2019) stated that the effect of events was different from country to country, pending on the popularity of the event or sport in the specific nation, and whether the nation itself offered similar events.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study established that international celebrity events destination promotion showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with tour firms' performance in Nairobi City County. Accordingly, the study concluded that hosting of events is important towards promoting destinations. This implies that hosting of events in destinations creates awareness, improves image of a place, and attracts tourism business. There is need to develop and organize special international celebrity events in the country by event organizers, which will increase the competitiveness of Nairobi City County as a potential tourist destination. Special events will improve the image of Nairobi County as a tourist destination and influence the perception of visitors and thus, boost travel to the country, which will ultimately culminate in huge benefits.

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