

RESEARCH NOTE

Tour Guides' Perception for Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to evaluate tour guides' perception of tourism sustainability using triple bottom line dimensions of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects as informed by Social Exchange Theory. A structured questionnaire was self-administered to tour guides around Mikumi National Park in Tanzania. Descriptive and mean comparison tests were performed with results indicating that tour guides perceive tourism to have positive economic and environmental impacts. However, surveyed tour guides thought that tourism in the area stimulated prevalence of bad behaviours like prostitution, alcoholism, and gambling. Furthermore, the results indicate that tour guides perceive tourism to increase imbalance and inequality in economic benefits. The results complement previous studies by capturing tour guides' views as well as testing the Social Exchange Theory. Furthermore, the results offer insights to destination managers and policy makers on possible interventions in furthering holistic and sustainable destination management. Keywords: Tourism, Culture, Tour Guides, Tanzania, Perception, Impacts

Introduction

Residents' perception of tourism impacts is considered to be one of the key determinants of destination sustainability as it determines their support for the industry (Lopez, Virto, Manzano, and Miranda, 2018; Sharpley, 2014). Overall positive perception towards tourism leads to residents offering support to tourism while overall negative or indifferent perceptions of tourism's impacts on the destination is likely to render the residents less supportive of the industry. This proposition is in line with the commonly used Social Exchange Theory in researching residents' perception of tourism impacts (Ribeiro, Pinto, Silva and Woosnam, 2017) with empirical evidence supporting the theory.

Despite residents' perception being extensively researched, most studies consider residents to be a homogeneous group, which ignores and overshadows the differences in perception (Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar and Barghi, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2017) and consequently leading to blanket strategies in sustainability management in a destination. Among the many tourism stakeholders, tour guides are considered to be key in determining destination sustainability due to their interpretational role (Weiler and Kim, 2011) that can shape tourist behaviour. Additionally, given the proximity of tour guides to the other stakeholders such as tourists and local residents coupled with the assumption that the guides have a thorough understanding of the destination; it can be assumed that they are able to

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notice the economic, socio-cultural and environmental changes in the destination, thus placing them as evaluators of the destination sustainability. However, studies capturing tour guide perception of sustainability are few with many focusing on their performance (e.g. Alazaizeh, Jamaliah, Mgonja and Ababneh (2019); Latkova et al., 2018). Most of the studies have been capturing anecdotally tour guides' perception of sustainability by focusing on the economic contribution of tourism without including the other aspects of sustainability. Adding to the body of knowledge available, this study aimed at evaluating tour guides perception of sustainability in the area around Mikumi National Park in Tanzania.

Methods

Data were collected in the first three weeks of August, 2019 using a self-administered structured questionnaire with 5-point Likert scales (5 Strongly Agree to 1 Strongly Disagree) adapted from previous studies. The questionnaire was distributed to tour guides around Mikumi National Park, located about 302 km from the commercial city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. A total of 70 questionnaires were returned with 61 usable data set. The data were analyzed descriptively and one sample t-test using neutral point of 3 as the benchmark. This was done because the operationalization of residents' perception of sustainable tourism is sometimes unclear with some adopting two positions (positive and negative) and some even three - including economic, environmental and socio-cultural perceptions (Gursoy, Ouyang, Nunkoo and Wei, 2019).

There was also the dilemma of treating these dimensions as reflective or formative (Rasoolimanesh, Noor and Jaafar, 2019). This study resorted to the analysis of items under the three dimensions. This is perceived to be appropriate as it reduces the possibility of some lower rated items being overshadowed by higher rated items that can lead to blanket recommendations. For instance, the overall macro-economic benefits of tourism that are experienced by many developing countries might mask some economic inequalities when the analysis focuses on a composite variable (Bianchi and de Man, 2020).

Findings and discussions

The sample consisted of 74% males, and the mean age of the respondents being 25.22 years with the ages ranging from 15 to 40 years. Slightly more than two thirds of the respondents (69.4%) had professional certificates while 14.5% had completed primary education and 16.1% secondary education. The results for the one sample t-test are presented in Table 1. Among the 24 item statements, 16 were significantly rated positively, while 5 were negatively rated and 3 were not statistically significant. Paired sample t-test was performed on satisfaction and overall perception of cost-benefit items with a t value of -1.690 that was significant at 10% was obtained.

Table 1. Tour guides perception of sustainable tourism

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	Remarks
Because of tourism activities the price of goods and services has increased	4.11	.608	14.314***	+
Tourism has created employment opportunities for local people	4.02	.904	8.786***	+
Tourism has led to imbalance in the distribution of economic benefits for people	3.89	.851	8.205***	-
Tourism has increased the level of my income	3.97	.701	10.877***	+
Due to seasonality of tourism, I receive different wages each season	4.18	.922	9.997***	-
Tourism has facilitated more investments and economic diversification	4.34	.574	18.290***	+
Tourism makes the local people involve themselves in bad foreign culture actions like prostitution	3.31	1.177	2.067**	-
Tourism makes local people involve themselves in bad foreign culture like taking drugs	2.98	1.008	-.129	Nil
Tourism makes local people involve themselves in bad foreign culture behaviours like using alcohol	3.64	1.021	4.759***	-
Tourism makes the local people involve themselves in bad foreign culture behaviours like gambling	3.47	.971	3.753***	-
Tourism makes the local people involve themselves in bad foreign culture behaviours like criminal activities	3.23	1.069	1.610	Nil
Due to tourism, the traditions and customs have loosened up and some have disappeared completely	3.13	1.648	.622	Nil
Tourism has led to renewal of local culture and understanding of cultural identity and traditions	3.90	.796	8.756***	+
Meeting people from other countries has made me get experience and a better understanding of their culture	4.37	.633	17.045***	+
Tourism has improved my relationship with my family and the community in general	4.07	.680	12.240***	+
Tourism has led to improvement in the quality of life of the people	4.02	.846	9.379***	+
Tourism has caused different environmental damages such as pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural resources	2.41	1.086	-4.245***	+
Due to tourism, I am now aware of the ways to protect the natural resources	4.35	.546	19.534***	+
Tourism has caused the area to have more rubbish and improper waste disposal	2.55	1.314	-2.706***	+
The construction of hotels and tourist facilities has destroyed the natural environment	2.39	1.371	-3.519***	+
Tourism has caused the areas around the park to be overcrowded	4.02	.974	8.023***	+
The roads and other public services have improved because of tourism	4.27	.841	11.666***	+
I am satisfied with the way tourism operates in my area	3.85	.903	7.458***	+
Overall, I think tourism offers more benefits than costs	4.11	.858	10.144***	+

*** Significant at 1%, ** significant at 5%

Generally, the results indicate that tour guides have positive perception of tourism impacts in and around Mikumi National Park. This typically reflects findings from previous studies undertaken in developing countries' contexts (Ribeiro, do Valle, and Silva, 2013) where tourism is still developing and the residents are yet to realize the full potential of the industry. The perceived negative impacts of tourism mostly relate to socio-cultural behaviours (e.g. prostitution, alcoholism, and gambling) and unequal income distribution both among individuals and variations of income for individuals (due to seasonality). The negatively perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism were also noted by Mbaiwa (2005) in Botswana. Such an effect might emanate from the economic needs that push residents to engage in prostitution and gambling in areas where tourism is growing and where the local residents can mingle easily with tourists and capitalize on possible opportunities to have income slices from tourist expenditure. Despite tour guides' appreciation of tourism's potential to create employment and increase personal income; they perceive the income not to be distributed equally among the residents. Such findings were also noted by Jeyacheya and Hampton (2020) in the context of Asian developing economies. The unequal distribution reflects the economic exclusion in tourism with some residents either lacking the means to access or not willing to participate in the industry (Imbaya, Nthiga, Sitati and Lenaiyasa, 2019).

Conclusions and implications

Tourism has both positive and negative impacts on a destination as can be perceived by the residents including tour guides who have high contact with tourists and the industry at large. In order to enhance sustainability in a destination, tourism management organizations and planners need to integrate residents' perception into their planning and operations. The findings of the current study provide practical insights in planning and managing tourism in and around Mikumi National Park. Based on Social Exchange Theory, tourism managers need to provide avenues and means for the residents to participate given that the benefits outweigh the costs of the industry. Specific for Tanzania and similar areas in African context, measures like social marketing initiatives can be taken to educate residents on the long-run benefits of cultural adaptation and harmonization, not only for the society but also to ensure the future inflow of tourists. The seasonality of tourism can be taken care of by introducing alternative attractions either natural or cultural. In the context of Tanzania where tourism is overly wildlife, efforts need to be made to introduce cultural attractions that can attract tourists during low seasons. To complement the findings from this study as well as other previous findings, future research can focus on the intricacies of the perception dimensions using multi-theoretical lenses apart from the commonly used Social Exchange Theory.

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