CONSUMER TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR AS A DETERMINING FACTOR FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF STAR-RATED BEACH RESORTS IN THE COASTAL REGION OF KENYA

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Abstract
The hotel sector is considered to have a bright vision for the growth of the travel and tourism industry by providing the country's economic growth. Kenya's beach resorts are among the best tourist destinations across the world. This paper assessed consumer travel behaviour as determining factor performance of star rated-beach resorts in the coastal region of Kenya. method approach was used to do a cross-sectional survey. The population comprised 585 guests. Guests were randomly selected, and questionnaires were used to collect data. Descriptive and inferential procedures were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that quality service, coastal beach ambience and holidays are vital in influencing consumer travel behaviour. This observation was due to high respective mean ratings of 4.29 and 4.26, with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.692 and 0.788. Peak seasons were observed in April- Easter week (61.1%) and December-March season (57.9%), while the lowest was in the October-December season (15.2%). The study concluded that Consumer travel behaviour has a significant performance influence on beach resorts. The study recommended that beach resort managers should capitalize on peak institutionalized seasons, especially on domestic consumers, to optimize sales that generate revenue to support businesses running in low seasons.
Keywords: Consumer travel behaviour, performance, Star-Rated Beach Resorts, Coastal Regions.

Background Information

Consumer travel behaviour entails travel decisions, activities, ideas or experiences that satisfy consumer needs and wants (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014). It is concerned with all activities directly involved in travelling, obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including decision processes that precede and follow these actions (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018). Patwary, Omar, and Tahir (2020) note that consumer behaviour is a decision process and act(s) that any person involved in buying and using any product goes through or experiences.

Consumer travel behaviour remains one of the most researched areas in the marketing and tourism fields, with the terms 'travel behaviour' or 'tourist behaviour' typically used to describe this area of inquiry. However, only a few comprehensive reviews of the literature on consumer behaviour concepts and models exist in the field of tourism. Confente and Vigolo (2018) attribute the lack of comprehensive reviews to the extensive breadth of the topic area itself, while the behaviour is generally considered a continuous process that includes varied yet inter-correlated stages and concepts that cannot be analyzed separately.

Though several studies (e.g. Nobar and Rostamzadeh (2018) and Njagi et al. (2017) have addressed the relationship between consumer behaviour and hotel performance, the focus has, however, been on individual concepts of the consumer. For example, the studies focused on consumer satisfaction, experience, loyalty, consumer influences and travel motivations. These studies, nevertheless, have not looked at the broader context of how consumer travel behaviour affects hotel performance at the destination level. In addition, their results cannot be compared due to differences in the research contexts based on tourist types or destinations, thereby hindering generalization. This hindrance implies that specific destinations require a specific review of consumer behaviour analysis to obtain accurate results.

Problem Statement

Despite increased efforts by stakeholders (such as beach resort managers and the government of Kenya) to make the hotel sector a driving force in achieving the national economic growth and development, consumer travel behaviour has continued to be a significant challenge in the tourism industry (Burugu, 2020). In particular, beach resorts on the Kenyan coast have continued to suffer from annual seasonal demand associated with consumer travel behaviour, affecting their performance efficiency. Even with the outstanding international source of tourism markets, reports have indicated that beach resorts in the coast region of Kenya have continued to experience the same negative impact due to consumer behaviour each year (Ogerson, Birkenstein & Mwongera, 2018). Notably, studies in Kenya on consumer travel behaviour (e.g. Njagi et al., 2017; Mwamburi, 2016 & Omare, 2016) have advanced research on travel motivations, customer satisfaction and consumer loyalty. However, previous studies have not comprehensively addressed issues on consumer travel behaviour as determining factor in tourism and its subsequent effects on performance at the destination level and beach resorts in particular.

Specific Objective

This paper investigates the relationship between consumer travel behaviour and star-rated beach resorts' performance in Kenya's coastal region.

Literature Review

Consumer behaviour is the study of how and why people buy products, services and processes involved when making such decisions (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). Patwary et al. (2020) agree that consumer behaviour is concerned with all activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision processes that precede and succeed these actions.

Horner and Swarbrook (2016) state that consumer behaviour is influenced by various factors such as social, cultural, personal perceptions and attitudes. Service quality that touches on all aspects of hotel operations including but not limited to; design and layout, menu planning, purchasing, furnishing, production and processing, packaging and delivery as well as destination ambience, affect patterns of demand at destinations (Anyanwu, 2019). Omare (2016) further notes that these factors can broadly be categorized as either internal or external determinants. Internal factors include, among others, age, gender, attitudes, personality, perceptions, satisfaction, income, occupation, education, family size, religion, race, generation, nationality and social class. In contrast, external factors include technology, government policies, generation change and the rise of ethical concerns in consumption decisions. On the other hand, Dai et al. (2015) maintain that demographic, social and cultural factors, which influence consumer behaviour, are the internal factors. Such factors include age, gender, income, occupation, education, family size, religion, race, nationality and social class (Dai et al., 2015).

In the tourism industry, consumer behaviour is influenced by a number of factors depending on the time and season of the year (Gnanapala, 2015). Climate change, natural environment, personal safety, and the tourism industry's seasonality nature are the four primary factors that are key in destination choice. Enemuo, Ijoma and Mgborogwu (2021), concurred that ordinary customer's perceived gurantee on quality, security and image was an important factor in determining a lodging choice while leisure travellers perceive that quietness, service quality and location of the hotel are more important factors for choice. Of these factors, seasonality is most crucial for tourist decision-making on destination choice since it affects tourist attractions, tourist products, travel patterns and visitor experiences which cannot be stored (Cooper, 2016). While Oses et al. (2016) believe that the choices of customers on resort destinations are more dependent on convenience, a wide range of alternatives and maximum satisfaction of the money spent, accessibility, as well social-cultural, personal reasons and seasonality, result in high demand on a fixed number of days referred to as peak season per annum.

Cooper (2016) explained that the Peak season is the best time to visit destinations such as coastal beaches to enjoy the sea breeze, relaxed atmosphere, hospitality, peaceful islands, and indulge in water sports. This makes peak seasons characterized by high numbers of travellers resulting in

congested operations, especially in beach resort setups leading to high performance.

On the other hand, off-peak seasons result in low traveller numbers interpreting to fewer demands, leading to a significant problem harming performance. Such negative impacts include difficulties in gaining access to capital, low returns on investment and the inefficient use of resources (Fernández-Morales et al., 2016). In particular, Beach Resorts on the coast of Kenya have continued to suffer from annual seasonal demand associated with the travelling behaviour of its consumers, which affects their efficiency in performance (Burugu, 2020); to unravel the discussion, a conceptual framework was developed as illustrated as a result of this.

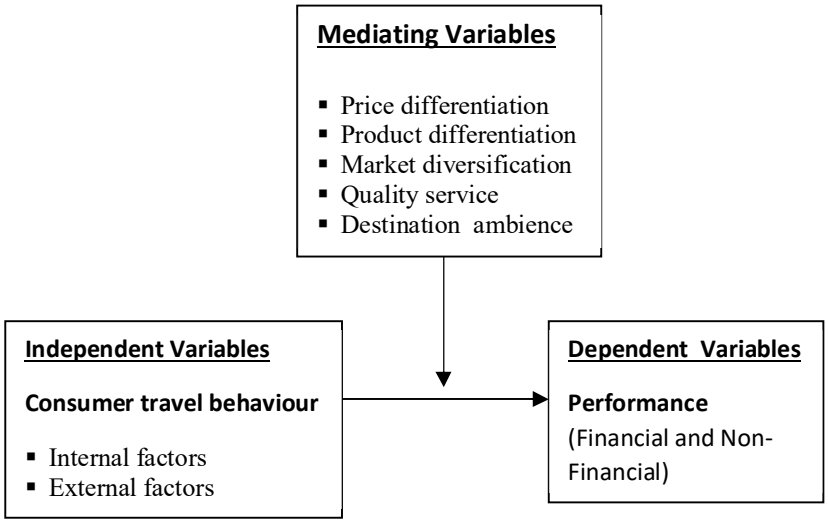


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. **Source:** Kwenga (2022).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design with questionnaires and interview schedules as research instruments. The study population comprised all guests in star-rated beach resorts. Using the probability sampling method, 586 guests were randomly selected from all-star-rated beach resorts in Kenya's coastal region to be respondents in the research. The study used a sample frame from the Kenya Tourism Board statistics on hotel bed occupancy in 2016, calculated at 49%. Descriptive and inferential analytical procedures were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Research Findings and Discussion

Table 1 below shows that most of the guests at the beach resort at the time of visit were males (60.4%), with female guests accounting for the

remaining 39.6%. This is probably attributed to males having more disposable income and leisure time than their female counterparts. It was further observed that the overall frequency of local guests was higher than that of foreign guests by 29.0%. This was probably due to containment measures taken by most foreign countries due to COVID 19. In terms of the age distribution of guests, it was noted that the majority of guests (77.4%) had their ages between 31 years and 50 years, with 31-40 years being slightly higher (40.2%) than 41-50 years' category (37.2%). The age bracket with the lowest percentage was observed to be "*Less than 21*" with only 0.6%, followed by "*Above 60*" and "*51-60*" categories with 1.2% and 7.9%, respectively. The level of professional training of beach resort guests varied from certificate level to postgraduate level.

On the question of how the visit was organized, most guests (39.0%) organized their visits themselves. This was attributed to the internal influence on consumer travel behaviour noted by Pittway & Rashid (2016). This category was followed by guests whose companies organized visits, accounting for 23.8%. Visits organized by family, agent, and group or mass accounted for 19.5%, 10.4%, and 7.3%. More than half of the guests (59.8%) responded that they visit Kenya annually. This proportion was followed by those who stated that they often visit Kenya quarterly (27.4%) and semi-annually with 10.4%. The remaining guests (2.4%) stated that they visit Kenya any time of the year. Further, 85.4% of the guests confirmed that they had previously visited the current resort, which could be why almost all guests (98.8%) were willing to recommend it to their friends. All cited quality services by the beach resorts as the main reason for their answer.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics for Guests

Gender	**n**	**Percent**
Male	297	60.4
Female	195	39.6
Nationality		
Local	342	69.5
Foreign	150	30.5
Age Distribution		
Less than 21	3	.6
21-30	63	12.8
31-40	198	40.2
41-50	183	37.2
51-60	39	7.9
Above 60	6	1.2
Professional Training Level		
Certificate	66	13.4
Diploma	162	32.9
Undergraduate	213	43.3

Postgraduate	51	10.4
How Visit is Organized		
Personal	192	39.0
By family	96	19.5
By company	117	23.8
By agent	51	10.4
Group/mass	36	7.3
Frequency of Trips to Kenya		
Annually	294	59.8
Semi-annually	51	10.4
Quarterly	135	27.4
All year round	12	2.4
Previous Visit to the Beach Resort		
Yes	420	85.4
No	72	14.6
Recommending the Resort to a Friend		
Yes	486	98.8
No	6	1.2
Total		**100.0**

Source: Kwenga (2022).

Consumer Travel Behavior in Coastal Beach Resorts

To understand consumer travel behaviour, the study adopted a Likert scale measurement. Respondents were asked about factors that motivate them to travel and dictate their travel patterns. From the Likert scale, four main factors were identified in Table 2.

Table 2: Consumer Travel Behavior

	Min	Max.	Mean	SD
Leisure	1	5	3.79	1.071
Holidays	1	5	4.05	1.038
Sports	1	5	2.60	1.300
Religious Activities	1	5	2.31	1.127
Business	1	5	3.25	1.220
Weather/climate	1	5	3.62	1.076
Coastal Beach Ambience	1	5	4.26	.788
Quality Service	3	5	4.29	.692
Cultural/traditional Festivals	1	5	3.25	1.230
Average			**3.491**	**1.060**

Source: Kwenga (2022).

The findings indicate that a high mean score is an indication that respondents generally noted that the corresponding factor is vital in

influencing consumer travel behaviour. From Table 2, it can be observed that quality service, coastal beach ambience, holidays and climate, among other listed factors, are vital in influencing consumer travel behaviour. Beach resorts perceived to offer quality services tend to attract more consumers. Also, consumers tend to travel towards coastal regions characterized by ambient environment. This observation was due to high respective mean ratings of 4.29 and 4.26, with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.692 and 0.788. A low standard deviation, as previously mentioned, indicated that there was a unanimous agreement that the four factors are vital in shaping consumer travel patterns.

Preferred Visiting Season

To isolate consumer travel patterns to coastal beach resorts, guests were required to state whether they always or rarely or never visited beach resorts during the stated seasons. The responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Preferred Visit Season

	Always	Rarely	Never
Dec-March (peak season)	57.9%	31.1%	11.0%
April- Easter week (peak season)	61.1%	28.8%	10.1%
Oct-Dec (shoulder season)	15.2%	56.1%	28.7%
April-July (low season)	28.7%	34.8%	36.6%

Source: Kwenga (2022).

As shown in Table 3, there were responses in each of the three response categories. To get a clear picture of the nature of the frequency of visits to beach resorts, the "Always" and "Rarely" categories were considered. In the "Always" category, high proportions were observed in April Easter week (61.1%) and the December-March season (57.9%), while the lowest was in the October-December season (15.2%). In the "Rarely" column, the highest proportion was observed in the October-December season (56.1%), while the least proportion on the April- Easter week (28.8%). However, it is worth noting that visitation patterns have changed with the Easter week season becoming the highest over the traditional December -March. This could be attributed to an increasing trend in domestic tourism.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Consumer travel behaviour is a determining factor for the performance of star-rated beach resorts in Kenya's coastal region**.** This was because it had a significant performance influence, especially on the destination beach resorts. The movement of consumers to a given destination or locality increases resorts' performance in that region. The study further concluded that April, Easter week, and December-March are peak seasons on Kenya's coast. Most consumers agreed that they visited coast beach resorts

annually, while a low season is generally observed during October-December and April-July seasons.

Finally, the study concluded that the beach resorts' quality services and the ambient environment were the main reason, among others, for guests to travel to beach resorts.

Recommendations

From the conclusions, the study recommended that beach resort managers capitalize on peak institutionalized seasons, especially on domestic consumers, to optimize sales that generate revenue to support the running of the business in low seasons.

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