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The Role of Tour Guides in Promotion of Sustainable Tourism Practices in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of tour guides in the promotion of sustainable tourism practices when visiting protected areas in Kenya when visitors watch wildlife. Although many scholars agree that tour guides have a role in satisfying visitors and promotion of a destination, limited studies have been conducted to find out the role of guides in promotion of sustainable tourism practices. The objective of the study was to examine the influence of tour guides work experience and their level of education on the way they implemented sustainable tourism practices. It also sought to examine whether tour guides adhere to their rules and code of ethics and whether their level of education and work experience had any influence. The target population was practicing tour guides who were randomly selected. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected. The findings from the Chi-square test of independence indicated no significant relationship existed between the tour guides experience and their opinion on their role in protecting wildlife and the environment, and promotion of sustainable tourism practices (χ^2=1.66, df =3, p=0.647) since the p-value was greater than 0.05. The study also noted that there existed a significant relationship between guides work experience (χ^2=11.71, df =6, p=0.069), guides level of education (χ^2=0.147, df =2, p=0.092) and their knowledge on visitors impact on the environment and wildlife. The study recommends regularly training of tour guides who then can educate the visitors on the impact of their activities on wildlife, environment and the local communities as a way of mitigating negative impacts

Keywords: Tour Guide, Role, Sustainable Tourism, Practices

1.0 Background of the study

Limited studies have been conducted in Kenya to examine the role of tour guides in the promotion and enforcement of sustainable tourism practices, a gap this study intended to fill. The study explored impacts of visitors to wildlife and the environment and what tour guides do to ensure negative impacts are mitigated and managed to the lowest level possible. It also evaluated some existing code of ethics that are intended to put in force sustainable tourism practices for both visitors and tour guides. The study proposed that the level of guides' education and work experience influences the way they communicate and enforce sustainable tourism practices while conducting a tour. It hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between tour guides work experience and their level of education and the way they communicate to their visitors 'sustainable tourism practices during the tour.

According to European Federation of Tourist Guide Association (WFTGA, 2013) a tour guide is a person who guides groups or individuals around venues or places of interest such as natural areas, historic buildings and sites, and landscapes of a city or a region; and interprets the cultural and natural heritage inspiringly and entertainingly in the language of the visitor's choice (Cetin, 2017). Tour guides thus play a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism. A study by Pereira & Mykletun, (2012) concluded that guides' contribution to sustainable tourism development is low. However, Kabii, (2017) and AP and Wong (2000) noted that tourist guides provide an important part of the interface between the host destination and visitors since front-line employees are very much responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction with the tour services offered by a destination.

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2.1 Role of tour guides in promoting sustainable tourism practices

The tourism industry is multi-faceted and its operation involves the collective effort of various players whose roles and responsibilities assist in promoting sustainable tourism. According to Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, (2016), an essential element for sustainable tourism development in any tourist destination is the participation of active stakeholders and their collaborations. The tour guides play a major role in the tourism industry since the tourists need to have a clear picture of the country and its offerings, laws, rules and regulations and other expected behavioral patterns (Kabii, 2017; Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). Tour facilitators such as tour guides therefore play a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism, though positively influencing tourist behaviour at the destination.

To promote sustainable tourism, there is need to enhance environmental sustainability since negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within acceptable limits of change. Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses potential threats to many natural areas around the world. It can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea; natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources (Sunlu, 2003).

The growth of tourism as the world's fastest-growing industry in the 21st century has brought with it major environmental problems which need to be addressed and resolved to achieve sustainability on the short and long term. Land degradation, pollution, desertification, waste, damage of species and inadequate utilization of natural resources have caused many natural resources to be endangered or even destroyed. Tourism can lead to negative consequences on the environment thereby reducing the quality of life of locals as well as that of the tourists (Muhanna, 2006). The depletion of natural resources can result in water shortages, create great pressure on other local resources like energy, food, etc., that already might be in short supply or destroy beautiful scenic landscapes.

These physical impacts cause land degradation, loss of wildlife habitats and scenery, disturbance and erosion of the local ecosystem caused by cleared forested land, construction of tourism facilities and infrastructure which may threaten the viability of the tourist's industry (Parrotta, 1997). However, tourism could promote positive impacts on the environment including the preservation of natural areas. In many tourism projects, the conservation of the natural, cultural and built environment is an important motivation for the initiation of the project. Sustainable tourism leads to the prudent management of all resources thus ensuring that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be filled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (Connell, 2009; Ester, 2012).

Sustainable tourism is really an issue of how best to encourage tourism growth while minimizing costs (Holden, 2016; McKrecher, 2003), and thus entails adequate utilization and management of resources to achieve economic, social and cultural needs while maintaining social, cultural integrity, ecological processes and biological diversity for the present as well as for the future generations. Therefore, modern tourism with its trends and characteristics cannot be promoted without considering environmental management as the main component of the economic aspects of tourism. As a central agent in the entire tourism system, tour guides have direct contacts with the visitors and the visited, working across all of the sectors of the tourism industry. They have a variety of roles to play in response to the expectations of various tourism stakeholders including the tourists, the destination resources, the local communities, the employers, the governmental authorities and the guides themselves.

Weiler & Ham, (2002) identified two roles that tour guides can and should play to fulfill their obligations to the natural environment for the sake of promoting sustainable tourism. They include: those of motivator, to modify tourists' behaviour and impact on-site, and environmental interpreter, to foster understanding and appreciation of environmental issues to facilitate responsible tourist behaviour in the long term. Haig (1997), cited in Weiler & Ham, (2001) the researcher tested and confirmed these two new roles in a survey of Eco tourists and non-Eco tourists. He found that eco-tourists particularly valued the role of the guide in motivating environmentally friendly behaviour.

According to Korir, Muchiri, & Kamwea (2013), there is a need for greater understanding of the costs and benefits of managing protected areas for wildlife-based tourism including the costs of providing the necessary visitor facilities such as trails, sanitation and waste management, and their maintenance, as well as the costs of providing interpretation and in some cases, habitat restoration.

2.2: Tour guides as enforcers of principles of sustainable tourism practices

According to the Hawkins, (2007) sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus-building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary (Niedziółka, 2014). According to Edgell (2016), sustainable tourism should maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Juandi , 2017).

Sustainable development is about integrating environmental concerns (both ecological and socio-cultural) and development (including material and spiritual well-being) in progressive and balanced ways and is hence a form of alternative development (Edgell,2016).The key objectives involve enhancing the quality of life for all people whilst maintaining the ecological and socio-cultural integrity of the world is human and natural resources (Twining-Ward, 1999). According to Heung (2010), a tour guide must have the capacity to articulate background information on the rich cultural heritage of a particular destination and must be aware of the policies, rules, laws and practices that are followed by a certain country, state or region to enlighten tourists and enrich their overall travel experience.

2.3: Impact of tourists in the environment

Tourists can hurt the environment that both undermines the basic resource for tourism in any area and heavily affects other non-tourist economic activities (Martin, 2018). To avoid these impacts tourism needs to be planned, managed and undertaken in a way that is environmentally sustainable, socially beneficial and economically viable (Kabii, 2018; Rabotic, 2010). Negative impacts of tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within acceptable limits of change (McCool, 2001). Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses potential threats to many natural areas around the world (Coccossis, 2017). It can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea; natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources (Black, 2016).

According to Sunlu (2003), tourists using the same trail over and over again trample the vegetation and soil eventually causing damage that can lead to loss of biodiversity and other impacts. Such damage can be even more extensive when visitors frequently stray off established trails. Anchoring and other marine activities: In marine areas (around coastal waters, reefs, beach and shoreline, offshore waters, uplands and lagoons), many tourist activities occur in or around fragile ecosystems. Anchoring, snorkeling, sport fishing and scuba diving, yachting, and cruising are some of the activities that can cause direct degradation of marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, and subsequent impacts on coastal protection and fisheries (Hall, 2001).

The concept of Eco-tourism has been championed by the tourist destinations in East and Southern Africa to change the big "five" mammals mentality and develop other environmentally friendly types of tourism (Getao, 2007; Kabii, 2017). Ecotourism is thus an important concept in tourism development. The latter incorporates a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility (Newsome, 2017). In this respect, the present and future generations are urged to conserve the environment while the Government is committed to strengthening and enforcing anti-poaching and nature-based conservation policies which will ensure the development of responsible tourism in the country.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive approach and used both qualitative and quantitative methods.The target population was practicing tour guides, with at least two years' experience, who had come from different touristic circuits in Kenya. They composed of both freelance and those on permanent employment. The sample size for the study was 76 respondents. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires while qualitative data was collected by interviewing some key informants.

The data collected was corroborated through field observations by the authors who have over twenty years' experience in interacting with tour guides in Kenya. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS while qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic analysis. The validity and reliability of data collecting tool were assessed using Cronbach's alpha test, which was 0.783 and was found satisfactory. The Chi-square test of independence and Pearson's Correlation tests were conducted to test the relationships.

4.0 Discussion of findings

The respondent's profile finding indicated that more than 99% of the tour guides were males. About 92% of them had secondary school as the highest level of education.

Minority 8% were university graduates. In terms of their professional training, 89% of respondents had a certificate in tour guiding while 11% were diploma holders. This indicated that tour guiding as a career does not attract university graduates and the few who are in guiding career were owners of the tour company but not employed. A comparative study with other countries in Africa and Europe would be necessary. The study noted that the majority (68%) of the respondents had less than 10 years' experience, with 29% having more than 15 years' experience. The majority (88%) earned less than USD 450 per month with only 10% earning more than USD 450 per month. Employment benefits and salary may also be a reason why tour guiding does not attract university graduates since they ask for a higher salary.

4.1Role of tour guides in protecting the environment

The study found that all respondents (100%) agreed that they have a major role in protecting the environment and educating the visitors on the same. Other roles that the respondents were in concurrence with was that they play an important role in protecting the local communities from negative socio-cultural impacts from the visitors (98.5%), educating the visitors on the need to minimize negative impacts to the local communities, enforcement of rules that govern protected areas such as national reserves and national parks (90%), and minimizing any activity that may affect wildlife during their game drives and nature walks. The findings from the Chi-square test of independence indicated no significant relationship existed between tour guides experience and their opinion on their role in protecting wildlife and the environment, and promotion of sustainable tourism practices (χ^2=1.66, df =3, p=0.647) since the p-value was greater than 0.05 as illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: The role of a guide in the protection of wildlife and the environment

Guides have a role of protecting the wildlife and the environment						
		Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Total	Pearson's Chi-Square test of independence
How many years have you worked as a guide	Less than5 years	27	2	0	29	(χ^2=1.66,df =3, p=0.647)
	5to10 years	22	1	0	23	
	10 to 15 years	22	0	0	22	
	Over 15 years	2	0	0	2	

4.2 Role of tour guides in the implementation of sustainable tourism practices

The study noted that there existed a significant relationship between guides work experience (χ^2=11.71, df =6, p=0.69), guides level of education (χ^2=0.147, df =2, p=0.92) and their knowledge on visitors impacts on the environment and wildlife (Table 1.2)

The majority (82%) of respondents indicated that at all times; they educated visitors on their impacts on wildlife and the environment. The study also noted that 73% of the respondents always informed visitors on their impacts on cultural and heritage sites as compared to 77% who said that they always educated visitors on their impact to the environment during game drives. From the findings, the study observed that most guides acknowledged their role in promoting sustainable tourism practices. However, further analysis showed a majority (60%) do not use refillable water bottles and are using individual water bottles, which they disposed off in lodges or other drop off points.

At the time of the study, the Kenyan government was advising all hotels and lodges to use refillable and reusable bottles as a way of reducing pollution through plastics. To mitigate these challenges, the study proposes that water dispensers should be availed to all tourist service vehicles, lodges and other accommodation facilities; and encouraged visitors to use reusable bottles. This will help in reducing plastic pollutants in protected areas.

The findings showed that more often than not, guides educate their visitors on activities and practices that may have a negative impact on wildlife and society. They also observe the code of ethics meant to protect the local communities and the environment. The study noted that guides (91%) advised their visitors not to carry anything from the areas visited, avoid water pollution, and pack all trash to avoid littering, reduce noise during game- drives and not to vandalize historical, cultural or religious artifacts of remains, as illustrated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Tour guides role in implementation of sustainable tourism practices

I Always Educate Visitors On Their Impact To The Environment And Wildlife					
Guides attribute		Always	Not at all	Sometimes	Pearson's Chi-Square Test of independence
worked experience	Less than 5years	82%	1	7	
	5to 10 years	86%	0	5	
	10 to1 5 years	54%	0	2	
	Over 5 years	100%	0	0	χ^2=11.71,df =6, p=0.069
Level of professional training	Certificate	74%	1	9	
	Diploma	86%	0	1	
Total		52	1	10	χ^2=0.147,df =2, p=0.092

4.3 Relationship between flouting of Park rules and regulations and guides work experience and education level

The other objective of the study was to examine why most protected areas in Kenya experienced off-road driving, overcrowding of wildlife during game drives and sometimes watching animals from too close and overstaying while watching and yet the guides acknowledged knowledge on how such practices affect wildlife and the environment. To respond to this objective, the guide was requested to indicate how often they engaged in some activities although they are aware of their negative impacts.

There was no significant relationship between respondent's work experience or their level of education and whether a guide observed or not park rules and regulations listed in table 3.

Table 1.3: Flouting of Park rules by respondents

Relationship between Flouting of Park rules and respondents work experience and level of education				
		True %	**False %**	**Pearson's Chi-SquareTest of independence**
i.	Sometimes I Watch wildlife closer than **recommended distance**	51	48	χ^2=0.650 df =1, p=0.418
ii.	Sometimes I find myself **chasing wildlife** during a game drive	34	66	χ^2=0.130 df =1, p=0.711
iii.	Sometimes I **feed** wild animals (primates and fishes)	19	81	χ^2=0.0 df =1,p=0.152
iv.	Sometimes my activities I**nterfere** with young animals	22	79	χ^2=2.460 df =1,p=0.117
v.	Sometimes I find myself **off road** driving	53	47	χ^2=0.127 df =1, p=0.722
vi.	Sometimes I stay **more than 10** minutes while watching wildlife	64	36	χ^2=0.942 df =1, p=0.322
vii.	Sometimes I find myself **littering** the park	11	89	χ^2=1.145 df =1, p=0.285
viii.	Sometimes I find my **activities disturbing** nesting birds	21	79	χ^2=0.513 df =1, p=0.474
ix.	Sometimes I find myself using **plastic water bottles**	48	42	χ^2=0.080 df =1, p=0.777
x.	Sometimes I using lunch box that is either **NOT reusable** or be recycled	58	42	χ^2=0.0.67df =1, p=0.195

The majority (51%) acknowledged that they have in some cases found themselves watching animals closer than the recommended distance. Most of them indicated that the pressure from visitors to have a better photo is the main reason. This affected most the members of the big five (lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants and buffalos) as well as the cheetahs. Another observable practice was off-road driving where up to 53% of respondents indicated that they have been involved in within the past 2 months of the study.

Follow up interviews indicated that sometimes guides drive off the main road when searching for wildlife. In some cases, animals are seen away from the main tracks and pressure from visitors to have a better look forces them to drive to the main tracks. The park regulations that were broken by the highest majority (64%) as staying for more than 10 minutes while watching animals and waste generation through use of non-reusable lunch boxes (58%), and disposable water bottles (48%), and generally littering the park (11%)

As illustrated in Table1.3, the respondents indicated that the most frequently flouted park rules included approaching wildlife closer than the recommended distance (51%), and to a lesser extent chasing wildlife during game drives (34%). This interferes with the wildlife ecological and behavioral patterns including foraging and mating, as well as posing danger to the visitors as a result of wildlife provocation. Other park rules that were flouted, though to a lesser extent included: feeding of wildlife especially primates and fish (19%), interference with young wild animals (22%) and disturbing nesting birds (21%). These may negatively affect the wildlife through habituation, starvation and separation of young ones from their mothers, and negative impact on birds' breeding behaviors, respectively.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study acknowledges the major role played by guides in education and enforcing sustainable tourism practices during game drives. Tourism is a major component of not only Kenya's, but also East Africa's tourism offering, and the sustainable management of the same is crucial to ensure the preservation of the resource base of this vital component in Kenya's tourism. The tour guides play a key role in tourist satisfaction through guiding and interpretation services, and can positively influence visitors' behaviour at their respective destinations, and hence play a vital role in the promotion of sustainable tourism practices. This may include observance of park rules and regulations, waste management, maintenance of vital ecological processes, cultural integrity, responsible experiential interactions with nature, and enhancement of responsible tourism principles.

The findings of the study further revealed that the respondents irrespective of their level of education and work experience, appreciated their role in the protection of destination tourism natural and socio-cultural resources base, through ensuring adherence to principles of sustainable tourism. The study further indicated that most guides needed more training on the effect of their activities on the environment and interrelationship between the environment and wildlife and tourist satisfaction. The respondents also indicated that in some cases, they find themselves helpless when they see local communities on whose land most wildlife roam, subdivide their land and change use from ranching to farming. The study revealed a significant relationship between the observed and expected frequencies of how the respondents educated their visitors on their impacts on the environment and sustainable tourism practices. The study recommends that the tour operators, the tour guides and the visitors be educated on code of conducts that support sustainable tourism practices and where possible commit themselves to adhere to these practices.

The researchers noted that in an attempt to appraise the visitors' on the expected behaviour at the national parks, Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) regularly distributed handbills with park rules and regulations at the park entry points. The same should be practiced by the national reserves which are under the jurisdiction of the county governments and also at the community wildlife conservancies. Uniformity of these rules should be encouraged on all protected areas whether private or public. For instance, interviews from key informants indicated that in the Mara triangle, drivers are allowed to drive off the main road when they see lions, cheetahs and Leopards while that is not allowed in the same park on the side managed by Narok county council. It's worth noting that this is the same ecosystem with different regulations. The study also indicated that sometimes the pressure from visitors and the office force the drivers to break some rulessince most visitors would like to see the big five in one trip and missing seeing them is interpreted as being unprofessional by some visitors who give negative feedback in case the tour guide does not give in to their demand. The study recommends continuous education to such visitors and high fines to those breaking the set rules and codes of ethics while in the wilderness.

At the time of the study, the Kenya's Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) had made it mandatory for all practicing guides lacking formal professional training to undergo an intensive one-month course at the Kenya Utalii College (Nairobi) and Kenya Wildlife Training Institute (Naivasha), for capacity building including sustainable tourism aspects. This should be enhanced through regularly reviewed curricula. The researchers would also recommend regular in-service course trainings to be organized mainly during the low season.

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