

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT PILLARS ON ESTABLISHMENT OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN NYANDARUA COUNTY, KENYA

Sarah Wamaitha Irungu.

Student, Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

Eddah Kipchumba.

Lecturer, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

©2026

**International Academic Journal of Innovation, Leadership and Entrepreneurship
(IAJILE) | ISSN 2518-2382**

Received: 10th May 2026

Published: 18th May 2026

Full Length Research

Available Online at: https://iajournals.org/articles/iajile_v2_i5_23_52.pdf

Citation: Irungu, S. W., Kipchumba, E. (2026). Destination development pillars on establishment of tourism industry in Nyandarua County, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Innovation, Leadership and Entrepreneurship*, 2(5), 23-52.

ABSTRACT

Tourism holds great potential for economic development, and establishing a robust tourism industry remained a key priority for emerging destinations such as Nyandarua County in Kenya. This study comprehensively analyzed the critical factors influencing the establishment of the tourism sector, with a focus on enforcement mechanisms and branding. The study offered insights that informed both regulatory policy formulation and entrepreneurial decision-making, aiming to build a competitive and resilient tourism industry in the region. It provided practical guidance to establish Nyandarua County as both a sustainable and competitive tourism destination. The study implemented three theoretical models as its foundation: the Destination Competitiveness Model, and Destination Image Theory. The research adopted a descriptive framework and focused on Nyandarua County's tourist sites together with community leaders as study subjects. The study targeted 109 respondents, consisting of government officials, NGOs, tour guides, environmentalists, and conservationists, who were chosen through purposive sampling, while local community members and hotel and lodge owners were selected through stratified sampling based on Taro Yamane's formula (1967) and the sampling ratio method by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). The study sample size total was 87 which comprised of 75 questionnaire respondents and 12 interview respondents. The research design combined qualitative

and quantitative data collection methods through a mixed-methods approach to achieve a comprehensive analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods, together with regression analysis, were used to process the data and determine relationships between independent and dependent variables related to tourism industry establishment. The research conducted both closed-ended surveys and open-ended interviews with essential stakeholders, including travelers, tour guides, hotel administrative staff, and representatives from environmental and conservation organizations. The data collection instruments underwent a pre-test evaluation, which led to the use of Cronbach's Alpha to measure their internal consistency. SPSS software was used for data analysis through frequency tables, thematic analysis methods, and chart presentations. Emphasize development of infrastructure through enhancing roads, utilities, sanitation, tourism facilities and connectivity. Encourage the public-police relationships to enlist funds and enhance effectiveness in investments related to tourism. Develop and execute an effective marketing and brand strategy with the help of digital platforms, partnerships, and market research to make Nyandarua County more visible and competitive in terms of tourism.

Keywords: Enforcement Strategies, Branding and Establishment of Tourism Industry.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is a very dynamic and the fastest growing sectors in the world that play a significant role in economic development, creation of employment opportunities, making foreign exchange and development of infrastructures. The UNWTO (2023) reports that the tourism industry before the COVID-19 pandemic had contributed to about 7% of all the exports in the world with one out of every ten employment opportunities in the world emerging from this sector. With the advent of the post-pandemic period, the sphere of tourism is changing, focusing more on sustainability, involvement on a community level, and technology-based solutions. These trends have revisited the issue of pillars that support development of destinations in particular in emerging markets such as Africa. The model of destination development pillars which are mainly comprised of infrastructure development, diversification of products, stakeholder cooperation, institutional mechanisms, and marketing has become the main theme of planning and policymaking in the tourism industry on a global level (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2020). It is evident destinations with sufficient managed convergence of these pillars have been in a position to show constant progress, rising customer satisfaction and their sustainability. Destination development in developing countries is however limited due to lack of infrastructure, poor policy frameworks and lack of community participation (Okazaki, 2022). These obstacles demonstrate the necessity to use a comprehensive, situation-related strategy of the development of the tourism industry, particularly, in emerging tourist destinations.

Globally, Costa Rica is one of the examples of established and developed sustainable tourism. The country has developed a good institutional base that is bound by the Costa Rican Tourism Board that is in control of planning, marketing and quality control in the industry. Costa Rica tourism approach has environmental sustainability as its core, as it ensures that its high biodiversity can be exploited through ecotourism at the same time offering protection to the natural resources. It has put in place Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program where tourism businesses are encouraged to be sustainable and this has become the yardstick across the world. Honey and Krantz (2020) remark that the commitment of Costa Rica in integrating state policy, business participation in tourism, and community-based tourism initiatives have helped the country to prove the effectiveness of properly coordinated elements of destination development on the competitiveness of the country tourism as well as the livelihood of those who live in rural areas.

In African context tourism is considered to be one of the essential tools of economic diversification and rural development. The African Union (2022) indicates that intra-African tourism is increasing but a lot of potential in the continent persists to be unexploited since there is a lack of tourism infrastructure, interconnectivity, and lack of proper institutional coordination. Destination markets, such as Rwanda, South Africa, and Morocco, have taken significant steps in investing in destination branding, policy transformation, and the formation of the public-private partnerships trans versed with the advising domain of destination development models (Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2021). An example of a well-developed strategic tourism can be seen in South Africa. This country has been able to become one of the

most popular African tourist destinations through an extensive national tourism strategy, proper marketing under the slogan of South Africa: Inspiring New Ways, well-developed Infrastructure, and with the help of closely integrated public-private partnerships (South African Tourism, 2023). The model of South Africa is one example of how well-organized development of destination can be a great contributor to GDP, job creation, and level of global prominence.

Kenya has made significant progress in the development of its tourism sector, which has emerged as a major contributor to the national economy. Tourism sector is the second most important source of GDP following agriculture with an estimated contribution to GDP of about 7.5 percent in 2022 (KNBS, 2023). The tourism sector in Kenya has emphasized on wildlife, coastal and cultural destinations such as Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Kenyan coast. Nevertheless, there have been recommendations in the Vision 2030 and the subsequent national development plans to diversify the tourism products and decentralize the tourism to involve the underrepresented counties. The board of Kenya achieves these objectives with the National Tourism Blue Print (2017-2030) that contains precise strategic aims towards the main destination pillars of destiny, which in this case involves the amelioration of infrastructure, product development, stakeholder involvement, and the sustainable management of available resources.

Therefore, government has made concerted efforts to diversify the sector by incorporating eco-tourism, cultural tourism and beach tourism in addition to normal wildlife safaris (Okello, Kenana, & Kieti, 2015). Kenya invested in the much-needed infrastructure to grow the industry, including the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) improving the destination accessibility of the coast, adding features to the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) and airstrips in the regions, which improve connections to other countries and within the country (Gachanja, 2022). The issue of institutional support has been critical here as well, with the emergence of the National Tourism Policy (2011) which offers a very coherent frame toward understanding tourism planning, regulation, and sustainable development (Munyao, Mulwa, & Ndivo, 2019). Development of more branding platforms like the existence of the Magical Kenya initiative in 2000 has also assisted in familiarizing the country in terms of its tourist identity in the global market as a competitive tourist destination (Waithaka & Wangui, 2017). Moreover, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) have played the role of bringing up the conservation-based tourism by protecting wild life and management of parks (Mwakimako, 2020). Community-based tourism projects have also been supported, which has promoted local involvement, the development of enterprises and opened employment opportunities, strengthening the notion of tourism as a well-structured and inclusive sector in Kenya (Murithi, 2018).

Narok County is a good illustration of a well-established tourism system in Kenya so far and it therefore acts as a yardstick that other counties can look up to, either in establishment or growth of tourism industries in their counties. Being the base of the famous world park- Maasai Mara National reserve, Narok enjoys the patronage of large number of tourists annually on a regular basis, because of the great wildlife and the great cultural heritage of the Maasai community. Through careful investment in the infrastructure and encouragement of the eco-lodges and

conservation zones, incorporation of local communities into the tourism and environmental management, the county has been able to develop a strong tourism framework and promote the region as a tourist destination. A study conducted by Nthiga, Muchiri, and Mugambi (2015) shows that collaborative government system and benefit-sharing arrangements with Maasai communities in Narok has greatly assisted the sustainable tourism results in the area. The direct economic gains have been possible because the Maasai have actively participated in conservancy management, provision of culture-related tourism service, and protection of their cultural heritage (Hassan et al., 2020; Mburu & Dube, 2017). Combinations of nature-based tourism, heritage, and eco-friendly travel are effectively integrated into governance of the county. The Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) and local tour operators are the other factors that have facilitated this success through promoting sustainable practices digitally, eco-certification programs, and collaborations with conservation organizations (Mwangi & Kinyanjui, 2016). The tourism model of Narok County shows the application of the coordinated planning, community participation, and effective public-private partnerships in plunging a successful and sustainable tourism business.

According to Kirimi (2016), Nyandarua County can be considered a place for tourism development and establishment due to its rich resources which include Lake Ol Bolossat, Aberdare Range, and Karura Waterfall which can offer substantial ecological and tourism significance in the region. Aberdare ranges have been widely recognized for its serene environment for wildlife, hiking, and camping and eye-catching waterfalls such as Karura waterfall which is the tallest and longest in Kenya and surrounded by indigenous green trees making it unique for both domestic and foreign tourists. Lake Ol Bolossat is known for numerous bird species and water wildlife such as hippos which also can attracts tourists being the only freshwater lake in the central region. Murungaru cultural mini-museum has also the potential of attracting the tourists to the area. This is because it has been home to many grasslands and endangered birds and has aided the preservation of tradition for the Kikuyu community. This museum has artifacts and tools used by the Mau Mau fighters in the era of colonization. The County also maintains important historical value through its pre-colonial settlement sites from colonial times that include the White Mischief Happy Valley homes which were built at the foot of the Aberdare Forest near where colonial settlers resided. The Mau Mau caves at Geta and Kimathi retain historical significance through preservation efforts managed by some Community-Based Organizations operating in the region. The government has been rehabilitating Kinyahwe Center which is part of Happy Valley as the cultural center which will promote cultural preservation and place of the community to showcase their heritage.

Nyandarua County has remained largely untapped as a tourist destination despite its rich natural and cultural asset. Located in Kenya's central region, Nyandarua is endowed with diverse attractions. The county has also special agro-tourism and cultural tours, based on its rural and mountainous setting, and on the variety of people living in the area. Nonetheless, tourism in the area is an issue as it encounters tremendous challenges. According to Mutua (2017), the main impediments are associated with poor roads fixation, underdeveloped community integration, ineffective tourism infrastructures and lack of institutional frameworks. Besides,

Njoroge (2020) cautions against environment degradation due to unregulated practices such as poaching and illegal fishing that endangers the ecological integrity of tourism destinations. For example, in year 2023, Nyandarua County Government called upon all the stakeholders to assist in saving the Lake Ol Bolosat which has been threatened by reduction in volume of water due to climatic change, deforestation, encroachment, overgrazing, and soils erosion. According to further research conducted by Gichunge and Kidombo (2022) and Muriithi and Gikonyo (2021), it is apparent that although Nyandarua has a potential in tourism, poor tourism policy integration, poor stakeholder connection, and inadequate destination marketing are the main causes of its underperformance. Hence, these are the areas in need of concerted efforts in tourism planning; enhanced infrastructural provision, protection of the environment, and participation of all members of the communities to realize the full potential of tourism in the county.

As such county government together with the national tourism agencies have undertaken a number of measures towards development of the tourism sector. These are; mapping tourism assets, development of policy frameworks, forging of public-private partnerships, and promotion of investment in key tourism infrastructure (CIPD, 2023). Nevertheless, such efforts are still out of order and the assumed significance of tourism to the economy of a county is still minimal. Conversely, it is seen that there is no empirical research that looked on how the destination development pillars are being implemented and how the pillars are impacting the development of the tourism industry in the Nyandarua County.

Therefore, this study examined how the key destination development pillars namely infrastructure development, branding, enforcement strategies, and community involvement, influenced the establishment and growth of the tourism industry in Nyandarua County. The study identified the strengths, gaps, and opportunities across these pillars, provided evidence-based recommendations to enhance tourism planning and implementation in the region. The findings also contributed to broader discourse on rural destination development and offer insights for other counties in Kenya facing similar challenges and opportunities.

Statement of the Problem

Nyandarua County possesses vast untapped natural and cultural tourism potential, yet it continues to lag behind in developing a vibrant and competitive tourism industry. The county possesses major tourist resources namely the Aberdare National Park, spectacular waterfalls like Karuru and Gura, Mau Mau caves, colonial era historic sites and the wide Kinangop plateau with its panoramic views of the Great Rift Valley. Despite this richness, Nyandarua has not effectively translated these resources into structured and market-ready tourism products capable of attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. These underperformances have been highly ascribed to a number of interrelated difficulties. First, the county suffers from inadequate infrastructure, including poorly maintained roads, limited accommodation facilities, and insufficient tourism support services, which deter investor interest and tourist access. Second, the county has no harmonized branding and marketing efforts to facilitate the selling of its tourism products at regional and international markets. Third, poor policy implementation and poor structures of governance have been a setback since the already set policies on tourism

development are not effectively implemented and tracked. Fourth, community participation and awareness are minimal and limits the ability of the community to own and develop tourism programs in the area.

Although, there exists some policy documentation including the CIDP 2023 and County Tourism Strategic Plan that could be used in guiding the vision of tourism development but there is not much evidence either empirically or on its actual effectiveness of the pillars that constitute the key destination development. Such information and analysis deficit results in a serious knowledge gap that compromises knowledge-based policymaking and policy improvement. Unless there is a better understanding as to how these pillars are performing at the local level, then responsive interventions will be difficult to design and progress will be hard to gauge. Hence, this study examined the extent to which destination development pillars influenced the establishment and growth of the tourism industry in Nyandarua County, with the goal of generating evidence-based recommendations to enhance tourism industry establishment.

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the effect of enforcement strategies on establishment of tourism industry in Nyandarua County, Kenya.
- ii. To analyze the effect of branding on establishment of tourism industry in Nyandarua County, Kenya.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section of the research provided a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the destination development pillars for the establishment of the tourism industry, focusing on key factors that influenced its growth and development. It presented empirical studies examining branding and enforcement strategies as critical determinants of destination development. Additionally, theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to the management and establishment of the tourism sector were integrated to establish a strong foundation for this study.

Theoretical Framework

This research study adopted the theory of destination competitiveness and destination image theory. The framework aimed to expound on the objectives being examined by portraying the conclusions from notions that had already been established. The theoretical framework offered a link between the subject being investigated and theoretical insights, as it provided a strong foundation to examine the problem (Odero, 2014).

Destination Competitiveness Theory

The Destination Competitiveness model acted as a lens by providing a comprehensive understanding of both micro and macro factors that impacted the competitiveness of a tourist destination. This model was used to expound on infrastructure development and enforcement strategies as pillars for the establishment of the tourism industry. The Destination

Competitiveness classic was initially established by Crouch and Ritchie in 1999 and later refined by Ritchie and Crouch in 2003. This classic assumed that tourist destination competitiveness arose from the interplay between comparative and competitive advantages. Comparative advantage denoted the multi-dimensional resources a destination possessed, such as natural landscapes, cultural heritage, biodiversity, and historical landmarks, along with supporting elements like community engagement, infrastructure development, accommodation facilities, tourism policies, and governance structures. On the other hand, competitive advantage was determined by how efficiently and effectively these resources were managed and utilized to create a superior tourism experience.

Dwyer and Kim (2003) expanded on this notion by recognizing crucial indicators of destination competitiveness, highlighting that it differed across nations due to varying dimensions. These dimensions included natural and cultural resource endowments; indirect resources such as infrastructure, events, and tourism superstructures; service quality and accessibility including transportation, hospitality, and visitor experience; and management of the destination, which included strategic planning, marketing, and sustainable practices. According to Leung and Baloglu (2013), tourist destination competitiveness played a fundamental role not only in the national economy but also in the community. Therefore, according to Pike and Page (2014), tourist destination management held a noteworthy position in the study of the tourism industry for tourism agents and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). Consequently, due to the evolving nature of the tourism sector, destination managers were required to equip themselves with suitable strategies to enable them to compete successfully and proficiently in global tourism competition, as they sought ways to benefit by understanding factors that shaped competitiveness in the sector (Du Plessis, Saayman, & Van der Merwe, 2017).

A better comprehension of the Destination Competitiveness Model factors supported the establishment of a robust tourism industry in Nyandarua County by enhancing its comparative advantage as a tourist destination. For example, strategic investment by the County government in infrastructure such as transportation networks, quality accommodations, reliable waste management systems, electricity, and water supply positioned the region to attract more visitors and stimulate tourism-related business activity. Additionally, the formulation and implementation of strong enforcement strategies, including conservation laws, effective monitoring mechanisms, and tourism-focused regulatory frameworks, ensured order, protected resources, and created a predictable operating environment for investors. By adopting the core characteristics of this model, policymakers could craft policies that encouraged investment in tourism infrastructure and offered incentives to businesses that supported responsible tourism development. These measures laid a strong foundation for the growth and competitiveness of Nyandarua tourism sector in both national and international markets.

Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory (DIT) provided a point of critique with respect to the determination of the role of branding and marketing as attributes in developing and establishing a tourism industry. The theory focused on the idea that the decision-making process of tourists was largely affected by the mental image of the destination, which was formed as a result of

cognitive (factual knowledge) as well as affective (emotional response) assessments. The Destination Image Theory (DIT), first proposed by Hunt (1975), formed a basis for understanding tourist perceptions in their travel and choice of destination. The theory assumed that the image of a destination was shaped by two interrelated components: cognitive evaluations, covering beliefs and knowledge about destination features such as natural beauty, safety, and infrastructure, and affective evaluations, which reflected tourists' emotions, such as excitement, relaxation, or attachment. These two dimensions integrated to form the global destination image, which then had a considerable influence on visitation intentions, actual visit behavior, and post-visit behavior, including satisfaction, loyalty, and recommendations by tourists.

DIT also assumed that a positive image could make a destination that was not yet well developed attractive, while a negative image could deter tourists regardless of the destination's offerings. The theory noted that destination images were influenced by different sources, including personal experiences, media depictions, word-of-mouth, and most significantly, branding and marketing campaigns. In this respect, DIT emphasized the central role of strategic image building and communication in shaping tourist behavior and the competitiveness of destinations.

DIT could be applied in the Nyandarua County context, which was in the process of establishing its tourism industry, as an essential theoretical concept guiding branding and marketing programs. Through well-designed visual identities, storytelling, and marketing campaigns, Nyandarua could create a powerful and attractive image constructed in the minds of prospective tourists, highlighting its unique tourism resources, including the Aberdare Ranges, panoramic landscapes, and cultural heritage. This perceived image would assist in attracting visitors, strengthening investment interest, facilitating public-private partnerships, and generating long-term competitiveness. Destination Image Theory thus served as a strategic tool for incorporating branding and marketing into destination development, contributing significantly to the positioning and establishment of Nyandarua as a competitive and viable tourist destination.

Empirical Review

Establishment of the Tourism Industry

Liu et al. (2021) explored the *Statistical Research on the Development of Rural Tourism Economy Industry under the Background of Big Data in China*. The study established how coordination and coupling between rural tourism efficiency and competitiveness can enhance economic performance in Jiangxi, China. By application of big-data analytics and systems theory, the study found a strong positive correlation between environmental quality, infrastructure development, and tourism competitiveness, revealing that regions with well-coordinated subsystems experienced up to 30% higher economic returns. However, key literature gaps are identified, including lack of literature on the dynamic nature of interaction between the environmental and operational aspects of rural tourism and the lack of utilization of real-time big data in making tourism policies. Also, the limited geographical scope of the current literature limits the findings generalizability. Therefore, a more diversified and scalable

research should be conducted, improved environmental planning and data-driven decision-making systems in order to foster sustainable growth of rural tourism. Hence, this study filled these gaps by incorporating recent tourism dynamics; also, the study used destination competitiveness theory, destination image theory and stakeholder's theory in order to establish a strong study foundation. The study was conducted in Nyandarua County Kenya in order to assess the impact of destination development pillars on establishment of tourism industry.

Butler, G. & Rogerson, C.M. (2016) investigated inclusive tourism and local development in South Africa evidence from Dullstroom. The study research methodology was a case study approach involving field observations, stakeholder interviews, and analysis of tourism trends. Theories adopted were Local Economic Development Theory and Inclusive Tourism Framework. The study revealed that tourism in Dullstroom evolved into a successful local industry driven by natural attractions, private investment, and niche products such as fly-fishing, agro-tourism, and second-home tourism. While initially benefiting mostly white elites, the tourism sector has gradually become more inclusive, with increasing participation of black residents in employment and small-scale enterprises. Some of the Gaps Identified entailed that despite emerging inclusivity, the study noted ongoing inequalities in ownership and access to high-value tourism resources, and a lack of strong local government planning to guide equitable development. Additionally, it is noted that the study was done in 2016 hence there is need to factor in changes in tourism dynamic, also the research context is restricted to Dullstroom in South Africa hence difficult to generalize the findings to other places due to different tourism dynamics. The study relied on local economic theory and inclusive tourism framework to draw its study foundation. Therefore, this study filled these gaps where the study incorporated recent tourism dynamics; also, used destination competitiveness theory, destination image theory and stakeholder's theory in order to establish a strong study foundation. The study was conducted in Nyandarua County Kenya in order to assess the impact of destination development pillars on establishment of tourism industry.

Akama and Kieti (2019) investigated *Tourism Governance in Transition Period: Restructuring Kenya's Tourism Administration from Centralized to Devolved System in Kenya*. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of devolution on tourism governance in Kenya, focusing on the restructuring of responsibilities from national to county governments. Through qualitative methodology, the authors discovered that although devolution has improved the local responsiveness and allowed site specific tourism development strategies, it has also led into coordination problems and revealed county-level limitations of capacities. Counties often lack adequate technical expertise and resources, resulting in uneven policy implementation and limited effectiveness in tourism promotion. A key literature gap identified in the study is failure to use insights from quantitative methodology, to make evaluations of devolution's impact on tourism performance indicators such as visitor numbers and revenue. Additionally, there is an absence of well-defined coordination frameworks between the national and county governments, and limited research exploring how institutional capacity-building could support establishment of devolved tourism governance more effectively. Therefore, this study filled these gaps where the study incorporated recent tourism dynamics; also, used destination competitiveness theory, destination image theory and stakeholder's theory in order to establish

a strong study foundation. The study was conducted in Nyandarua County Kenya in order to assess the impact of destination development pillars on establishment of tourism industry.

Branding and Establishment of Tourism Industry

According to Musa, Omar, and Mukras (2020), Kenya is reputable as a home for tourists and hence largely attracted tourist inflows for some time. Kenya has effectively and efficiently applied various strategies in branding and marketing through the launch of campaigns such as ‘Tembea Kenya’ and ‘Magical Kenya’ which have promoted tourism. Nyandarua County, though, has many natural resources such as Aberdare Ranges and Lake Ol Bolossat these resources remain underutilized as the County has not effectively invested in marketing these destinations hence restraining its potential (Kirimi, 2016). According to the study done by Muchiri (2020); marketing strategies and approaches that are focused on a community help in promoting eco-tourism and cultural heritage and therefore, enhance tourism sustainability. In this modern world advancements in technology can be integrated into the tourism sector which includes the use of social media to launch campaigns to promote tourism and with partnerships with the Tourism Board of Kenya, the county government of Nyandarua can benefit from the likely visibility as a major destination of tourists.

Research conducted by Asfar (2019) assessed how visitors perceived the destination image of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The study evaluated the impact that specific images alongside complete picture understanding and emotional interpretation have on final destination impressions. The researcher used a quantitative approach that collected information using questionnaires. The research analysis included 250 participants who visited Jordan at the time of the study. The study used Spearman correlation coefficient to perform statistical analysis between different research variables. King Abdullah Economic City earned high marks from participants who linked its four components to their perceptions of the destination image. The research contained meaningful findings but faced restrictions based on 250 survey participants and quantitative measurement techniques and analysis of data from 2019 which reduces applicability for present-day tourism evolution. The study overcame previous research limitations by use of current data and collecting information through mixed-methods research techniques. The paper examined infrastructure development, branding along with community engagement and enforcement mechanisms as foundational elements for tourism sector development in Nyandarua County.

George (2015) performed an evaluation of destination branding effectiveness through examining Kenya and South Africa which helped reveal both successful and failed branding factors. A total of 500 respondents consisting mostly of tourists from both countries participated in the study leading to the analysis through regression methods. Tourist perceptions about travel to Kenya and South Africa as destinations depend heavily on the implementation of strategic branding tactics. The research demonstrated that these strategies function well based on political stability levels together with infrastructure quality and tourism investments made. The study delivered beneficial insights about African destination branding yet the limited research subjects prevented universal application of the findings. Future

research needs to utilize larger sample groups while investigating destinations in various African countries to provide detailed insights into branding practices in the continent.

Using regression analysis, George's study looked into the efficacy of different destination branding strategies. However, given that the sample was composed of only 250 tourists from each country (500 tourists overall), the study may not have given a true representation of the many different kinds of demographics that are found within Kenya and South Africa. In other words, this means that the findings of this conceptualization applied to only these two countries, and only small portions can probably be attributed to other regions due to different tourist dynamics, branding approaches, and socio-economic environments. Further the research only used quantitative and failed to incorporate qualitative information. Being conducted in 2015, the research could not factor in improvisation such as a shift in the modern world that digital marketing is coming with, among other important developments that would require updating. Consequently, this study discoursed these gaps by use of a mixed method approach to explore how branding and enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding of the establishment of tourism industry in Nyandarua County incorporating the more recent data on tourism development in the sector.

Gathogo and King'ei (2019) performed a comprehensive evaluation of destination branding strategies together with their influence on Kenya's tourism industry growth. The research explored the methods which determine how visitors perceive Kenya as a tourism destination. Research examined 384 international tourists visiting Kenya in 2017 through regression analysis. Research results demonstrate that destination branding strategies act as vital elements for modifying visitors' perceptions of destinations. Destination image functions as a major link which connects branding strategies to tourists' perceptions about Kenya. Knowledge gained from this study helped experts understand branding effectiveness in Kenya's tourism sector better. Due to their limited number of participants at 384 tourists the study results lack generality because they do not depict the full spectrum of Kenya visitors. Additional studies need to expand their research participant numbers in order to produce results that apply to a wider audience. Additional research should apply mixed-methods to investigate the branding strategies and tourist perceptions relationship because the current research uses solely quantitative methods.

The study focused on the tourism sector in Kenya and therefore, the results may not apply to Nyandarua County due to different environmental and policy frameworks. The study used destination branding strategies and destination image theories, which may not explicitly incorporate recognized branding theories such as the Brand Equity Model or Destination Competitiveness Framework, which might reinforce its theoretical basis. Considering the study was done in 2017, the result may not incorporate current progress such as digital marketing, post-pandemic changes in tourist tastes, and the developing geopolitical landscape. Hence, this study used the mixed-method approach to capture perspectives from different stakeholders. Also, the study integrated models such as destination competitiveness to strengthen the theoretical basis of the research. The research objectives were to examine how branding and

enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding tourism industry establishment in Nyandarua County.

Research by Okumu, Amwata, Mathews, and Wandaka (2023), demonstrated that a sentimental image of the destination enhances the attraction of wildlife parks in Kenya's Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem. As the largest protected wildlife reserve in Kenya the ecosystem remains challenged by minimal tourist numbers together with insufficient revenue generation. The research evaluated destination branding effects on park appeal through surveys conducted with 440 visitors and 28 tourism experts chosen through random selection methods. The research analysis showed positive brand image affects park attractiveness ($\beta = 0.653$, $t = 12.792$, $p = .000$) through descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. Public policy officials developing parks and marketing strategies should implement these findings due to their proven ability to increase tourism operations.

The results of the study were significant in providing policymakers with information to guide the development and marketing of wildlife parks in Kenya. Understanding the importance of emotional links providing some backbone to tourist perceptions could allow tourism stakeholders to develop more effective branding strategies for raising both visitation and revenue. The study by Okumu et al. used simple random sampling and regression analysis, focusing on park visitors and tourism experts as the respondents, hence ignoring the efficacy of other important shareholders such as local communities, conservationists, and government agencies. The study is restricted to the Amboseli-Tsavo Ecosystem, making it problematic to generalize results to other wildlife parks with diverse environmental and tourism settings. Theoretically, this research major on affective destination brand image ignoring critical factors like contending strategies, policy outlines, or infrastructure that may influence park appeal. Although the study is recent, tourism sector changes and other external aspects such as climate variation, economic changes, and developing technologies may influence the lasting pertinence of the results, demanding constant research. Consequently, this study discoursed these gaps by use of a mixed method approach to explore how branding and enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding of tourism industry establishment in Nyandarua County.

Mwawaza (2023) performed comprehensive research into destination promotion strategies and their impact on local tourism performance in Mombasa County Kenya. This research investigation sought to analyze the relationship between destination image and its supporting elements such as travel motivation and tourist products to measure tourism performance. The authors collected data from 444 respondents who included domestic tourists together with tourism agencies and associations by employing questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions under a descriptive cross-sectional design. The 60.5% of tourism performance variation emerged from the combination of travel motivation together with marketing efforts and tourism products along with stakeholder involvement based on SPSS analysis. The research through hierarchical regression demonstrated that cognitive destination image functions as a moderator between essential relationships yet affective image influences solely the connection between travel motivation and performance. The study demonstrated the

essential role of promotion strategies for domestic tourism growth while proposing studies to discover extra influencing variables. This study offered good ideas and comprehension as we delve into our study. Nevertheless, the study outcome could not be generalized to broader perspectives as the study scope was limited to Mombasa County, Kenya. Hence, this study used the mixed-method approach to capture perspectives from different stakeholders. Also, the study integrated models such as destination competitiveness to strengthen the theoretical basis of the undertaking. The research intents examined how branding and enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding tourism industry establishment in Nyandarua County.

Enforcement Strategies and Establishment of Tourism Industry

Tourism sector establishment can only be realized through the formulation and implementation of effective policy and enforcement strategies. Munyao, Mulwa, and Ndivo (2019) in his study he stipulated that Kenya's National Tourism Policy (2011) plays a very crucial part in environmental conservation and in promoting good tourism practices. The lack of policies in the tourism sector has been associated with an increase in unregulated tourism activities, ecological degradation, resource conflicts, and poaching (Njoroge, 2020). According to Ochieng & Okello (2020), effective tourism policies ought to include regulations of land usage, wildlife preservation measures, and incentives for eco-tourism practices. Costa Rica, for example, has applied Payment for Environmental Services (PES) to inspire landowners to safeguard forests (Pagiola, 2017), a method that could be simulated in Nyandarua.

Baloch, Khan, and Iqbal (2022) did research on the association between tourism development and ecological suitability to suggest a context for sustainable ecotourism in Pakistan. The study outlined the importance of policy formulation and support of the government in creating a balance between both ecological and business interests to maintain a health environmental system. The study engaged a sample of 650 which encompasses tourists, local community representatives, tour operators, hoteliers, and government officials. Questionnaires were drafted to include a brief explanation of the study variables to offer a better comprehension to the respondents while collecting information. The analysis of data was done by the use of hierarchical regression after the instrument validity and reliability were ensured. The research found that a considerable number of individuals recognize the benefits associated with tourism growth and development through employment creation, development of infrastructure, and growth in businesses. Nevertheless, the study found an increase in ecological degradation due to land over-exploitation, air and water pollution, and community susceptibility is reported due to interruption from external cultures.

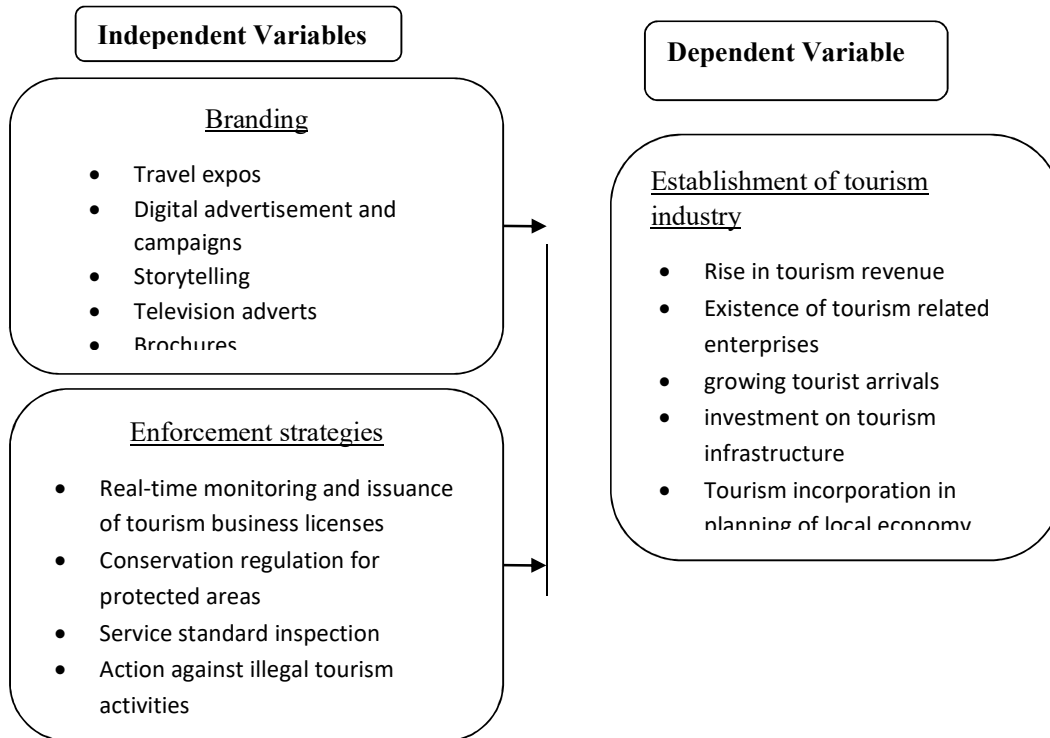
The study proposed a framework for developing a sustainable ecotourism sector, drawing particular attention to helpful policies, supportive government initiatives, and the effective conservation of the environment and natural resources. This system ought to strike a balance between environmental preservation and economic sustainability and the betterment of the social well-being of the local communities. The study by Baloch et al. provided very important information in our research, though the study was done in Pakistan which limits the applicability of the outcome in another region with different ecological and economic factors.

The study relied only on a quantitative approach for data collection which could hinder incorporation of ideas from other stakeholders. Therefore, this study addressed these gaps by use of a mixed method approach to investigate how branding and enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding of establishment of tourism industry in Nyandarua County.

Maingi (2019) examined the effects and causes of over-tourism within the East Africa region. The study objective of this research was to establish how the problem of over-tourism is being addressed by the national governments in the East Africa region, also the study aimed to establish essential policies and ideologies, sustainable tourism accreditation of preeminent practice, management, and governance in addressing the problem of over-tourism. The study used an exploratory experience survey research design, together with a review of the literature and interviews with practitioners in the industry. It aimed to bring together all derived variables contributing to over tourism, its effects, and local governance into one, coherent, and systemic dimension of analysis. Hence, the results are grouped into four main classes about tourism impacts in East Africa: psychological, physical, economic, and socio-cultural. It also deals with how over-tourism is being addressed by the governments of East African countries while giving recommendations on improving the enforcement, governance, and coordination of tourism regulations and policies in the region.

The study by Maingi concentrated on East Africa, and hence the study's geographical scenarios may limit the insights from this research to be applied in areas with unrelated structures of governance and tourism policies. Additionally, the study adopted an exploratory experience survey research design and relied on a review of articles and interviews with practitioners, which even though valuable may have a deficiency of experimental complexity from quantitative analysis. The study was done in 2019; it may not completely capture the influence of current changes such as technological developments, and developing regulatory outlines, therefore a need for recent studies. Henceforth, this study incorporated the mixed-method approach to capture perspectives from different stakeholders. Also, the study integrated models such as destination competitiveness to strengthen the theoretical basis of the research. The research objectives were to examine how branding, and enforcement strategies contributed to destination development pillars and upholding tourism industry establishment in Nyandarua County.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a descriptive survey research design was used. This method combined both descriptive analysis and survey methodology to collect and analyze data in a methodic way. This design worked well when investigating patterns, attitudes, and qualities in a certain population and thus it was useful when investigating the nature and the magnitude of the issues which were researched. It enabled the comparison between times and the defining of trends, hence making the illustration of the subject thorough.

The research study happened in Nyandarua County situated within the central part of Kenya. The researcher chose this particular area because its tourism prospects held substantial promise, hence attracting investors to enter the tourism industry. Lake Ol Bolossat together with Karura Waterfall, the Murungaru Cultural Mini-Museum, Kinyahwe Center, and the Aberdare Range along with other attractions made this area suitable for cultural and adventure tourism activities. The pre-colonial settlement sites included the White Mischief Happy Valley homes and Mau Mau caves, which were also included in the study. Nyandarua County possessed valuable natural and cultural assets that could transform it into a leading tourist destination through active stakeholder partnership. The KNTB 2030 report identified Nyandarua as an imminent tourism destination, so studying its growth factors supported sustainable tourism development across the region.

The research groups consisted of representatives of the Kenya Wildlife Service, county-level tourism management officials, and members of the Kenya Tourism Board. The research study also included interviews with hotel and lodge proprietors and tour guides in addition to local tourism community members, NGOs and their representatives, and environmentalists together with conservationists who operated within Nyandarua County. The chosen stakeholders gained selection because they had strong influence together with legitimacy and practical experience in the development and establishment of sustainable tourism practices in Nyandarua County. The total population was 1036 out of whom a representative sample of 109 was scientifically determined using the Taro Yamane's (1967) simplified approach.

The research design contained quantitative and qualitative components for data gathering. The blend of qualitative and quantitative data assortment methods made the research more reliable and produced deeper findings which allowed for a detailed data analysis. The choice of data assembling instruments followed the specific data requirements as well as the goals of the study. The study employed a face-to-face written questionnaire with the help of semi-structured guidelines. These questionnaires were administered to the local community representatives due to their large numbers. The study made use of questionnaires because these tools provided an accessible method to develop and cost-effectively analyze data using simple techniques.

A descriptive statistical analysis approach was selected to study the collected data, which revealed the relationships among variables. The mean function, along with frequency counts and percentage calculations, served to evaluate both the quantitative variable means and qualitative response distributions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Numerous researchers agreed that these statistical methods effectively summarized quantitative data because they enabled better data interpretation and pattern recognition. Frequency tables were used to display results due to their ability to create organized arrangements for easier comparison as well as increased clarity.

The study implemented regression analysis and additional inferential statistical techniques to calculate the inclusion rates of observed patterns contained within the collected sample that might have existed in the original population. The relationships between variables were studied through regression analysis because it helped assess affiliations among independent and dependent variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Mendenhall and Sincich (2011) stated that inferential statistics use sample data to develop population-level estimates through judgment-based forecasting methods.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

An aggregate of 91 questionnaires was sent to the targeted respondents. Where 75 questionnaires were well filled and submitted, however, 16 questionnaires proved to be unusable due to errors and incomplete responses. This presented valid response rate of 82.4% that is beyond the 75% minimum threshold for academic research, as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). The study also sought to interview 18 key informants' drawn from various stakeholders. Some of these were officials from the Kenya Wildlife Service

(KWS), tour operators, among others, from Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), the officials from the County Government of Nyandarua Department of Tourism (CECM and Chief Officer), the managers of local NGOs, hotel and lodge proprietors, environmentalist/conservationists. From the 18 targeted respondents, 11 successful interviews were conducted with 66.7% response rate.

On background information about the respondents, the data indicated that the tourism sectors in the region seem to be moderately female-dominated as 60.00 % of the respondents revealed that they were of female gender while 40.00% were male. This relatively non-gender-skewed portrayal means that both male and female perspectives are debated thus making such a discussion of issues in tourism establishment more inclusive and gender sensitive.

Data on the age distribution indicated that the respondents aged 18-25years were 18.67% of the total number, 24.00% were between the 26-35 years old, 38.67% were within the 36–45-year age group, 14.67% fell between 46–55 years, and 4.00% were aged 56 years and above. From these findings, it is evident that most community members engaged in tourism activities are adults of ages 36-45 years implying that middle aged are the central members of the community when it comes to participation and involvement in tourism sector. The age group is likely to play a very important role in decision-making, resource management and establishment of tourism ventures in their communities.

Data on levels of education attained by the respondents indicated that the members of the community involved in tourism activities in Nyandarua County. Via the data presented, 2.67% of the respondents had no formal education, 13.33% had attained primary education, 26.67% had completed secondary education, 30.67% had diploma qualifications, 24.00% had earned a bachelor's degree, and 2.67% masters and other. From these findings, one can see that a majority of the respondents were well educated indicating that they had the ability to comprehend and discuss concepts on development of a sustainable tourism.

Establishment of Tourism in Nyandarua County

Under this section, the researcher provides details on tourism establishment in Nyandarua County. The table presents the perception of respondents concerning some of the key indicators taken in development of tourism in the county. These indicators encompass the expansion of the tourism businesses, inflow of tourists, creation of jobs, investment in the private sector and inclusion of tourism as a part of the county planning. Mean scores and standard deviations are also given to generalize the responses in the listed statements in table 1 below;

Table 1: Establishment of Tourism

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	MEAN	SD
There has been a growth in the number of tourism enterprises in the county.	29.3%	49.3%	14.7%	6.7%	-	4.01	0.85
Tourist arrivals (domestic and international) have increased in recent years.	13.3%	53.3%	26.7%	6.7%	-	3.73	0.78
The tourism sector has contributed to job creation in the county.	12.0%	56.0%	25.3%	5.3%	1.3%	3.72	0.80
Private sector investment in tourism has grown over time.	10.7%	53.3%	20.0%	16.0%	-	3.59	0.89
Tourism is integrated into the county's development planning and budgeting.	16.0%	48.0%	22.7%	13.3%	-	3.67	0.91
Total						3.74	0.84

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 1 above shows findings indicate total positive perception of tourism industry growth in the county, as reflected by an **overall mean score of 3.74 (SD = 0.84)**. A substantial majority of respondents (**78.6%**, comprising **29.3% strongly agree** and **49.3% agree**) indicated that there has been growth in the number of tourism enterprises in the county. This suggests a noticeable expansion of tourism-related businesses, reflecting increased tourism activity and destination development. With regard to tourist arrivals, **66.6%** of respondents (**13.3% strongly agree** and **53.3% agree**) agreed that both domestic and international tourist arrivals have increased in recent years. Nevertheless, 26.7% of the respondents had a neutral position and it means that as much as there is a growth in the number of arrivals, it might not be experienced uniformly in all parts of the county.

Regarding the issue of employment creation, 68.0% (12.0% strongly agree and 56.0% agree) respondents confirmed that the tourism industry has helped to create employment in the county. A considerable **25.3%** of respondents were neutral, while a small proportion (**6.6%**) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting variations in perceived employment benefits. Concerning private sector investment, **64.0%** of respondents (**10.7% strongly agree** and **53.3% agree**) believed that private sector investment in tourism has grown over time. Nonetheless, **20.0%** were neutral and **16.0%** disagreed, indicating mixed perceptions and possible constraints affecting investment growth.

Lastly, 64.0% of the respondents (16.0% strongly agree and 48.0% agree) responded that tourism is a part of the development planning and budgeting of the county. Nonetheless, 22.70

percent were neutral and 13.30 percent disagreed implying that tourism is recognized as a development sector but its incorporation in planning and budgeting activities might not be entirely harmonized. The findings indicate that tourism in the county is believed to have a positive growth trend in terms of contributing to the development of enterprises, growth in the number of tourists, creation of employment, and inclusion in the development planning, as evidenced by a total mean of 3.74.

These findings are in line with theoretical view, since the findings can be attributed to the theory of Butler Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which is that destinations pass through exploration, involvement, and development stages. The findings can be interpreted to imply that Nyandarua County is at involvement to early development stage whereby the activities of tourism are growing, the involvement of the private sector is coming in and the local governments are also integrating tourism in planning and budgeting. This is a vital step, because enhancing the pillars of destination development will count on the shift of county towards a more established and sustainable tourism sector. Empirically, Mwangi & Munga (2021) on festival tourism in Mombasa County, Kenya, concluded that recurrent cultural festivals facilitated the transition of the destination to the involvement stage to the development and consolidation driven by the attraction of more tourists and enhancement of tourism infrastructure and services. This underscores the importance role these factors play.

The interview responses were compared and analyzed thematically using texts from key informant on matter of establishment of tourism in Nyandarua. The study postulated that county government of Nyandarua department of tourism CECM and chief officer and also environmentalist and conservationists together with hotel and lodge proprietors had to offer their insights regarding the issue of tourism establishment and development in Nyandarua county. They were coded respondents R6, R7, R10 and R12 respectively.

The results from the interview established the following results presented in themes;

Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Conservation

It was highlighted by the respondents that sustainable tourism in Nyandarua is closely related to environmental conservation. They observed that the tourist potential of the county is pegged on the preservation of forests, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and the general biodiversity. Green activities like clean energy use, correct waste disposal, recycling and construction that are environmentally friendly were regarded as the way of conserving the natural beauty in Nyandarua. Respondent 9 said,

“Hotel and lodges should be the first one to institute environmentally friendly practices through the use of clean energy, effective recycling, selection of local farmers and constructing buildings that blend in nature.” Similarly, respondent 12 said *“the development of tourism in Nyandarua would be pegged on the management of the local forests, wetlands and wildlife corridors that will comprise our special tourism products.”*

These insights show that there is high local awareness that sustainable tourism in Nyandarua cannot be done without environmental conservation. The conservation of natural resources is

perceived as both a moral duty and an economic agenda that should be used to develop a robust, unique and sustainable tourism sector.

Community Engagement and Local Empowerment

The respondents highlighted that the inclusion of local communities in the tourism planning, operations and profit-sharing is critical to inclusive and sustainable tourism development. The respondents emphasized the need to offer jobs, enhance cultural awareness, and engage communities in decision making. Respondent 6 said that

“the inclusion and sustainability of the development of tourism can be achieved through the involvement of the local communities in planning and the tourism activities in the county.”

This perception embodies a common belief that meaningful community engagement does not only favor social and economic development, but also conservation initiatives. Communities will safeguard the natural resources when they have a sense of ownership on the tourism project and this will lead to the sustainability of the sector in the long term.

Policy, Governance, and Infrastructure Development

Respondents underlined the fact that proper policy application, good collaboration between stakeholders, and the application of the law are critical measures that ensure development of tourism activities in Nyandarua. According to them, good governance should be accompanied by physical infrastructure that is sufficient (good roads, accommodation facilities, services) so as to provide conducive environment in the development of tourism.

The respondents however also noted that loopholes in these areas still detract progress. Poor infrastructure, inadequate accommodation facilities and lack of awareness of the people on the issue of tourism policies were noted to be among the major challenges. Respondent 6 said,

“Tourism in Nyandarua is based on good policy implementation and cooperation with stakeholders in enhancement of law enforcement hence limited infrastructure, inadequate accommodation, and low awareness of tourism policies must be addressed.”

Marketing and Promotion of Tourism Attractions

The respondents emphasized that strategic marketing and promotion are essential in raising the level of awareness and attractiveness of the tourism products offered by Nyandarua as well as its competitiveness. They stressed that, even though the county has a great amount of natural and cultural resources, they are still not widely recognized, both locally and internationally. This means that there must be some systematic and premeditated marketing to make Nyandarua a unique tourist destination. Another important suggestion involved community-based tourism projects because such projects directly engage the local people in the process of presenting their cultures, their crafts, their meals, and their lifestyles. These initiatives do not only make the visitors experience even more, but they also make sure that the tourism positive effects are returned to the community resulting in local tourism support. Respondent 7 pointed out,

“Strategic marketing and community-based tourism initiatives can assist in highlighting the attractions that are unique to the county.”

This is an indication that there is a mutual understanding that proactive promotion together with local participation is the key to unlocking the tourism potentials of Nyandarua.

Enforcement strategies on the establishment of tourism in Nyandarua County

This part provides details on enforcement mechanisms as far as tourism establishment in Nyandarua County is concerned. The table presents the perception of the respondents on different regulatory and monitoring policies applied by the concerned authorities. The statements include; the clarity of policy, enforcement of the law, the conservation of both environmental and cultural sites, the sanctions that apply to the law breakers as well as the awareness of the people regarding the tourism related laws. Mean scores and standard deviations are provided to give an overview of responses in these indicators of enforcement in general as show in table 2 below:

Table 2: Enforcement Strategies On the Establishment of Tourism

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	MEAN	SD
The county government has clear policies to regulate tourism activities.	4.0%	58.7 %	22.7 %	6.7%	8.0%	3.4	1.0
Law enforcement agencies effectively monitor tourism activities	5.3%	48.0 %	26.7 %	18.7%	1.3%	3.4	0.9
There are clear policies protecting environmental and cultural sites.	6.7%	40.0 %	41.3 %	8.0%	4.0%	3.4	0.9
There are penalties for businesses and individuals who violate tourism regulations (e.g., pollution, poaching).	8.0%	44.0 %	36.0 %	8.0%	4.0%	3.4	1.0
I am aware of specific tourism-related laws and regulations in Nyandarua.	5.3%	48.0 %	26.7 %	18.7%	1.3%	3.4	.9
Total						3.4	0.9

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 2 above underscores the perception of the policies governing the tourist activities of the county government by individuals. In particular, 4.0% strongly agreed and 58.7% agreed that the county government has clear policies to control the activities of the tourism industry, whereas 22.7% neutral, 6.7% disagreed, and 8.0% strongly disagreed (M = 3.4, SD = 1.0). When it comes to law enforcing, respondents strongly agreed 5.3% and agreed 48.0% that their

agencies were effective to monitor tourism activities, with 26.7% neutral, 18.7% disagreeing, and 1.3% strongly disagreeing ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.0$). Regarding the environmental and cultural sites protection, 6.7% strongly agreed and 40.0% agreed that there are clear policies, 41.3% were neutral, 8.0% disagreed, and 4.0% strongly disagreed ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.9$). Regarding the consequences of breaking the rules in tourism by any business or individual, 8.0% strongly agreed 44.0% agreed, 36.0% neutral, 8.0% disagree and 4.0% strongly disagree ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.9$). Lastly, in terms of awareness of certain laws as far as tourism is concerned in Nyandarua, 5.3% strongly agreed, 48.0% agreed, 26.7% neutral, 18.7% disagreed and 1.3 strongly disagreed ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.9$). In general, the findings indicate that there is moderate agreement regarding the existence and implementation of tourism policies, as the mean amount of 3.4 ($SD = 0.9$) is average, besides suggesting the presence of different opinions and awareness among the participants.

Despite the existence of policies to ensure the direction of tourism activity, it is possible to improve them, make them more transparent, understandable, and practical to help the tourism sector. Destination Competitiveness Theory (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) establishes that the capacity of a destination to attract and retain tourists is not only determined by the attractions and infrastructure of a destination but also governed by the administrative system, law and order, as well as the effectiveness of institutions. Clear and enforced policies bring stability and predictability in the environment of the investors, service providers and tourists, which increase the competitiveness of the destination. Considering the case of Nyandarua County, moderately clear policies indicate that the governance is providing competitiveness, yet the lack of unified communication or implementation can allude to the maximum potential of tourism establishment and sector development. This is backed up by empirical research in Kenya. The researchers discovered that counties with visible and implemented tourism regulations reported a greater level of compliance as well as improved management of resources and increased investment by the private sector (Njoroge and Kihoro, 2020).

Interview responses were compared and analyzed thematically using texts from key informant on matter of enforcement strategies in establishment of tourism in Nyandarua. The study postulated that KWS official and Nyandarua county CECM and Chief officer tourism had to offer their insights regarding the issue of community involvement in tourism establishment and development in Nyandarua county. The respondents were coded as 1,6 & 7 respectively. The results from the interview established the following results presented in themes;

Policy and Legal Frameworks with Resource Support

The implementation of policies concerning tourism is important to establishment of sustainable tourism in Nyandarua County but has challenges that include limited resources;

“It is usually very difficult to apply these policies, since even the most thorough ones often lack the necessary funding.” This was according to respondents 6.

This means that policies might be well-designed but fail due to financial constraints, lack of institutional support as well as loopholes in operational capacity. Enhancement of resource allocation and implementation mechanisms is hence critical in a move to convert the policy intentions into action.

Collaboration, Awareness, and Sustainable Practice

The findings recommended the county to tighten the liaison of multi-agencies in order to have a unified approach to the enactment of laws and by-laws. Enforcement, community education, and awareness programs need to be invested in to advance compliance and sustainability in the long run;

“Another issue is that we should do better in linking with county agencies and making people see the importance of protecting our environment for a long time”.

The policies should be also flexible and progressive to accommodate the arising challenges like the climate change and tourist activities and be able to balance between the growth of tourism and protection of environment.

This is according to respondent 7 commentaries

“Our enforcement groups must improve and we ought to concentrate on information programs while ensuring that our polices are flexible and forward-thinking in dealing with recent issues such as climate change and too many visitors.”

Raising awareness among communities, tourists, and stakeholders supports policy compliance and establishment of sustainable tourism practices.

Branding/ Marketing on the Establishment of Tourism in Nyandarua County

This segment shows branding and promotion initiatives that support tourism establishment in Nyandarua County. The table shows the perception of respondents towards different promotional strategies that were employed in the positioning of the county as a tourist destination. The assertions dwell on areas including overall marketing, utilization of digital features, cultural events, relationships with tour operators, and the necessity of further investment in branding. Mean score and standard deviation have been presented to describe the general thoughts about these marketing efforts as shown in table 3 below;

Table 3: Branding/ Marketing on the Establishment of Tourism

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	MEAN	STD
Nyandarua County is well marketed as a tourist destination.	4.0%	40.0%	41.3%	14.7%	-	3.3	0.8
Digital platforms (social media, websites) are used effectively to market tourism.	12.0%	38.7%	29.3%	16.0%	4.0%	3.4	1.0
There are sufficient cultural festivals and events	10.7%	40.0%	30.7%	16.0%	2.7%	3.4	1.0
The county government collaborates with tour operators to enhance tourism branding.	9.3%	44.0%	35.3%	12.0%	1.3%	3.5	0.9

More investment in marketing and branding would significantly increase tourism revenue in Nyandarua County.	10.7%	37.3%	28.0%	17.3%	6.7%	3.2800	1.1
Total						3.4	0.9

Source: Field data, 2026

Table 3 above contains the perception of the respondents on branding and marketing of tourism in Nyandarua County. The findings indicate that 4.0% of the respondents strongly agree and 40.0% agree that Nyandarua County is being marketed well as a tourist destination whereas 41.3% were neutral and 14.7% disagree ($M = 3.3, SD = 0.8$). When it comes to the use of digital platforms like social media and websites, 12.0% strongly agreed and 38.7% agreed that they were used effectively where 29.3% were neutral, 16.0% disagreed, and 4.0% strongly disagreed ($M = 3.4, SD = 1.0$). When it comes to cultural festivals and events, 10.7% strongly agree and 40.0% agree that there are enough activities and 30.7% were neutral, 16.0% disagree and 2.7% strongly disagree ($M = 3.4, SD = 1.0$). On collaboration, 9.3% strongly agreed and 44.0% agreed that the county government cooperates with tour operators to boost tourism branding, and 35.3% of the neutral, 12.0% of the disagreeing, and 1.3% of the strongly disagreeing ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.9$). Finally, on investment in marketing, 10.7% strongly agreed, 37.3% agreed, 28.0% were neutral, 17.3 yes and 6.7 strongly disagree ($M = 3.3, SD = 1.1$). In general, the findings suggest that there is moderate consensus in the effectiveness of tourism branding and marketing practices in the county, and the mean is 3.4 ($SD = 0.9$).

Generally, the findings indicate that branding/ marketing is currently in use, but it is not very effective in developing a strong destination image and attracting the tourists. Digital platforms are essential in creating cognitive and affective elements of a destination image as per Destination Image Theory. The proper application of social media, websites, blogs have a high potential to shape the perception of potential tourists, their travel intentions and decision-making processes. The moderate success of digital marketing in the Nyandarua County case means that the online presence of the county is already helping in image making but it is still not likely to have a fully formed destination image to be popular and viewed as a strong destination. Empirically, Sigala (2018) points out, digital marketing is very effective in promoting destination awareness, creating brand image, and facilitating interaction, all of which are major tourism development and establishment drivers.

This is further proved by empirical research studies in which Mburu and Ngugi (2019) found that diverse cultural events that are community-oriented to attract tourists do not merely attract visitors but also enhance social cohesion and empower local communities economically. Thus, through strategic expansion, marketing and diversification of the cultural events, Nyandarua County is able to use the cultural heritage as a major tourist attraction and enhance the development of the tourism sector and the competitive package of the county as a destination. The results of interview were compared and analyzed thematically using texts from key informant on matter of branding/ marketing in establishment of tourism in Nyandarua. The study postulated that KTB and Hotel and lodge proprietor had to offer their insights regarding

the issue of branding/ marketing in tourism establishment and development in Nyandarua county. The respondents were coded as 4 & 10 respectively.

The results from the interview established the following results presented in themes;

Destination Visibility and Storytelling

Branding and marketing are of essential in laying Nyandarua County as a competitive tourism destination. It is suggested that the county should come up with a powerful destination brand that will emphasize the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and the unique wildlife experiences in the county.

Respondent 4 said;

“Nyandarua has tremendous potential, but it lacks the visibility enjoyed by more established destinations. One strategy would be to develop strong destination branding, complete with storytelling that highlights its natural beauty, historical sites, and local communities”.

This promotes destination recognition and hence attraction of both local and international tourists in the region.

Digital and Collaborative Marketing

Marketing activities between Kenya Tourism Board and the local hotels, tour operators and community stakeholders should be based on digital, storytelling, and experience-based promotions. This will be achieved by improving visibility by providing better signage, online presence, and support to the locals so as to encourage responsible tourists and sustainable growth in the tourism industry.

Respondents 10 commentary was as follows;

“We have gorgeous scenery, cultural heritage, and wildlife sightseeing in our county, which are not always advertised. Concerned authority should prioritize on collaborative marketing in order to create appealing tour packages. More responsible travelers can be drawn to the company by incorporating the use of storytelling in the form of photography, community-based experiences, and conservation tourism themes. In addition, better visibility and signage on the online sites would be beneficial in placing Nyandarua on the map of the tourist as the preferred tourist destination.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The results of this research show that the four pillars of destination development including community involvement, enforcement strategies, infrastructure development and branding/marketing as hypothesized in the research hypotheses are very critical in the establishment of tourism in Nyandarua County. The regression equation ($R = 0.893$, $R^2 = 0.798$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.787$) shows that the combination of these four factors explains tourism establishment variation by an approximation of 79.8% which conveys the fact that the predictors are very significant and the model fits the data well. In particular, the hypothesis tests confirm that the influence of community involvement (H_1), the enforcement strategies (H_2), the development of infrastructures (H_3), and the branding (H_4) is positive and statistically

significant on the establishment of the tourism industry in the county, thus the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This highlights the need to invest and work together in these sectors to ensure sustainable tourism development, deepen the involvement of the locals, increase the levels of compliance and effectiveness of regulation, physical and service infrastructure and tourism branding of the county. However, it is also evident in the model that 20.2% of the variance in tourism establishment is unexplained, which can also imply the possibility that other factors, including national policy support, innovation in the private sector, environmental conservation policies, or global tourism trends, also affect tourism results and thus can be investigated further in the future. On the whole, these results allow drawing empirical conclusions that the effective creation and successful growth of tourism in the Nyandarua County require a multi-dimensional approach.

Recommendation

Enforcement strategies on establishment of tourism in Nyandarua, County

The results showed that efficient enforcement policies have a substantial impact on the implementation of tourism because they provide sustainability and order in the industry. It is suggested that the county government should enhance the administration and application of the current tourism, environmental conservation policies, land-use, and cultural heritage policies. Government agencies ought to do frequent monitoring and examination of tourism businesses to see whether they are adhering to the set standards and regulations. Moreover, the enforcement bodies ought to be sufficiently manned, trained and equipped to perform their duties efficiently. Improvement in inter-agency cooperation between tourism, environmental and security departments will lead to better coordination and less regulatory gaps. Regular implementation of the policies will assist in the protection of the natural and cultural resources and at the same time enhance responsible tourism practices.

Branding/ marketing on establishment of tourism in Nyandarua, County

The study established that marketing and branding play a significant role in enhancing tourism establishment in Nyandarua County. It is therefore recommended that the county develops a strong and distinctive destination brand that clearly communicates its unique tourism offerings. This branding strategy should highlight key attractions such as natural landscapes, outdoor recreation opportunities, cultural experiences, and agro-tourism potential. The county should adopt modern marketing approaches, including digital marketing, social media engagement, official tourism websites, and online booking platforms to reach a wider audience. Participation in tourism fairs, exhibitions, and strategic collaborations with national tourism organizations and tour operators will further enhance destination visibility. Continuous market research should also be conducted to understand tourist preferences and tailor marketing strategies accordingly.

REFERENCES

Abbas, J., Mamirkulova, G., Al-Sulaiti, I., Al-Sulaiti, K.I. and Dar, I.B. (2025), "Mega-infrastructure development, tourism sustainability and quality of life assessment at

- world heritage sites: catering to COVID-19 challenges", *Kybernetes*, Vol. 54 No. 4, pp. 1993-2018. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-07-2023-1345>
- Adams, M., & Inoue, C. (2014). Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism in Developing Countries. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(6), 819-837.
- Ahmed, F., & Khan, S. (2018). Community engagement in sustainable tourism development: The case of Dubai. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Tourism*, 7(4), 56-71.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.
- Bansal, P., & Kaur, R. (2016). Government regulations and tourism sustainability in Dubai: A case study of the Dubai Tourism Strategy 2020 and UAE Vision 2021. *Journal of Tourism Policy*, 8(1), 23-34.
- Briedenhann, J., & Wickens, E. (2004). Tourism Routes and Gateways in Southern Africa. *Tourism Geographies*, 6(1), 73-97. Brundtland, G. H. (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press.
- Butler, R. W. (1999). Sustainable Tourism: A State-of-the-Art Review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1(1), 7-25.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crouch, G.I., & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1999). Tourism, Competitiveness, and Societal Prosperity. *Journal of Business Research*, 44(3), 137-152.
- Field, A. (2018). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Gathogo, J. & King'ei, I. (2019). The Role of Marketing in Promoting Kenya as a Tourist Destination. *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, 59-69.
- George, B. P. (2015). Destination branding: A study on the branding practices of four Nordic destinations. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 1(1), 17-22.
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2015). *Tourism and Water: Interactions, Impacts and Challenges*. Channel View Publications.
- Hall, C. M. (2008). *Tourism and Regional Development: New Pathways*. Routledge.
- Hassan, A., & Kaur, S. (2020). Smart infrastructure and sustainable transport: A critical factor for promoting sustainable tourism in Dubai. *Journal of Sustainable Cities*, 11(3), 45-58.
- Kangogo, M. (2014). Tourism and its Impact on the Rural Economy in Kenya: A Case Study of Kajiado County. *Journal of Tourism Research*, 5(2), 78-94.
- Karanja, M. (2021). Climate change and its impact on tourism in Kenya: Insights from Narok County. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 16(2), 78-89.
- Kihu, A. (2021). Integrating Cultural Heritage in Tourism Strategies for Sustainable Development. *African Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(4), 118-130.
- Kinyua, J. (2022). Infrastructure Development and its Role in Sustainable Tourism in Kenya. *Journal of Infrastructure and Tourism*, 8(3), 102-116.
- Kirimi, R. (2016). Tourism Potential and Sustainable Development in Nyandarua County, Kenya. *African Journal of Tourism and Development*, 6(1), 35-49.

- Liu, X., Xiao, Y., & Wu, H. (2021). Statistical research on the development of rural tourism economy industry under the background of big data. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2021, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/9152173>
- Mburu, J., & Dube, T. (2017). Community-based tourism and sustainable development: The case of Maasai Mara. *African Journal of Tourism and Cultural Studies*, 13(1), 33-45.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Acts Press.
- Müller, D. (2017). Economic incentives for sustainable tourism practices: The role of the private sector in Dubai. *Tourism Economics Review*, 8(3), 88-102.
- Mutua, M. (2017). Challenges in Promoting Sustainable Tourism in Rural Kenya: A Case Study of Nyandarua County. *Journal of Tourism and Development*, 10(3), 45-60.
- Mwangi, S., & Kinyanjui, M. (2016). Towards sustainable tourism in Kenya: A critical review of current practices in Narok County. *Journal of Tourism Research and Practices*, 6(1), 45-59.
- Njoroge, J. (2020). The Impact of Unregulated Tourism on Natural Resources in Nyandarua County, Kenya. *International Journal of Environmental Conservation*, 11(3), 45-61.
- Ondicho, T. G. (2017). The role of local communities in tourism development: A case study of cultural tourism in Kenya. *Kenya Studies Review*, 7(1), 34–50.
- Ritchie, J.R.B., & Crouch, G.I. (2003). *The Competitive Destination: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective*. CABI Publishing.
- State to map tourist sites and upscale sector in Nyandarua county. (2025b, April 3). The Star. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-04-03-state-to-upscale-tourism-in-nyandarua-county>
- Tosun, C. (2019). *Community-based Tourism: An Ecological and Sociological Perspective*. Routledge.
- Tosun, C., & Timothy, D. (2016). Tourist behavior and sustainability awareness: A study of sustainable tourism campaigns in Dubai. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 5(2), 29-42.
- World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2017). *Tourism for Sustainable Development in Least Developed Countries*. United Nations.
- Cerdas, L., & Zylberberg, E. (2014). Tourism, sustainability, and development in Costa Rica. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(3), 408-426.
- Zuo, B., Huang, S. S., & Yang, Y. (2025). *Tourism development, institutional quality, and economic growth: Evidence from a cross-country analysis*. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 46, 101214.