

Enhancing Visitor Experience in Museums to Increase Visitation

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Abstract

Museums in Kenya are very conservative and passive in the way they present their products to visitors. The number of visitors to museums and historical sites in Kenya are very low compared to those visiting wildlife and beach attractions yet the museums have very rich cultural artifacts and heritage. The study adopted an explanatory research design and was carried out in Kitale Museum. The aim was to establish the purpose of participants' visit to the museum, the products offered, and whether the visitors were satisfied with the visit to the museum. 176 visitors were interviewed using structured questionnaires and 6 museum workers were engaged in face to face interviews. Secondary data was collected from the museum registry. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings provide evidence that the purpose of visit for majority of the visitors was educational. Most learnt about the museum through word of mouth, and most were dissatisfied with the presentation and interpretation of museum products. The satisfaction of the visitors significantly affects the decisions of the visitors to revisit the museum ($\chi^2=149.961$, $df=4$, $p=0.000$). Previous visit has a significant influence on the return visit ($\chi^2=6.789$, $df=2$ $p<0.031$). However, it was observed that the museum does not meet the diverse needs of visitors; it is poorly marketed and products are poorly presented and interpreted to the visitors. The museum management needs to improve on its marketing strategies, diversify its products as well as embrace competitive strategies of interpreting and presenting their products and should involve the local communities.

Keywords: Museum, Experience, Satisfaction, Visitation.

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Introduction

The number of tourists seeking heritage, culture, history and adventure is rising every year and many museums all over the world are moving from information and learning

to a distinctive environment that gives consumers a greater participation, quality service and experience (Law, 2002). In developed countries, museums have diversified their services and programs with the aim of improving their image and attracting more tourists (National Museums Directors Conference, 2010). In 2008/09 14 million visits were made by visitors from overseas to 17 UK museums (National Museums Directors Conference NMDC, 2010).

Law (2002) asserts that museums should move away from their former traditional set up to become more inclusive and attractive destinations, which should position them to meet the changing tourist needs and expectations as well as the challenges of the present generation. In a move towards this change, some African countries like Senegal and Mali have museums acting as platforms for expressing community's feelings and expectations, making the museums in these countries more interactive than passive (ICOM, 2002). In Dar-es salaam, Tanzania, village museums are venue for different ethnic groups who recreate their rich traditions through traditional practices, food preparation, storytelling and dancing. It gives people the opportunity not only to enjoy but also to identify their roles in the community which is a strategy employed to reach out to the local communities (ICOM, 2002).

Kenya has over 40 ethnic communities each of which represent cultural groups with myriads of cultural artifacts and practices (Sindiga, 1996). The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is charged with the responsibility of the management and conservation of museums, monuments, antiquities, and historical resources. Currently, there are 22 regional museums and many prehistoric and heritage sites managed by NMK. These museums have very conservative policies and many people perceive them as archives of humanity. Museums offer a uniform package to all visitors regardless of age, income, tastes or purpose of visit. The traditional huts have no artifacts and those found in the gallery cannot be linked in their use in the traditional huts. The visitors are passive observers of what is displayed and may not easily distinguish artifacts' of one community from another (Irandu, 2004). Furthermore, the number of visitors to historical sites and museums in Kenya continue to decline significantly with some sites having zero visitors compared to those visiting wildlife and beach attractions which has been caused by low competitiveness with regard to infrastructure, lack of effective policy environment and low number of developed heritage sites (Irandu, 2004, Kenya Economic Report (2009).

Kenya has very rich culture, diverse heritage and history that has not been utilized fully in tourism sector as a source of revenue (Irandu, 2004). Much emphasis in tourism marketing has been on beach, wildlife and sports tourism giving very little attention to museums as a tourist attraction (SNV, 2010). In addition, there is poor presentation and

interpretation of the artifacts, monuments and other heritage resources to tourists which makes museums not attractive enough for tourists (Ikiara, 2001). Moreover, local communities are not involved in the interpretation of cultural artifacts. Presentation of oral culture in museums is lacking and it is an aspect that can bring life to museums. Museums also lack tourism support facilities and spaces to meet the needs of its visitors. NMK is constrained by inadequate resources to finance all the museum projects (Nyangilia, 2006).

Tourism in Kenya is recognized in Vision 2030 as a key sector in the transformation of the country. To achieve this objective, the tourism industry must expand her global and African market share by offering new products, contribute to the tourists' expenditure increase and also improve her international marketing strategies. The Tourism Goal in Vision 2030 is for Kenya to become a top-ten long haul destination in the world offering a high-end, diverse, and distinctive visitor experience and also encourage domestic and regional tourism in order to even out fluctuations occasioned by the decline of visitors during the traditional low seasons (Kenya Vision 2030). The Vision 2030 backs the National Tourism Policy (2005) and the Heritage and Cultural Policy (2009) which recommended the improvement of design, marketing, interpretation and packaging skills of tourism products especially those related with culture.

The low visitation scenario has implications on museums as heritage, culture, information and recreation centre. There is need to understand the tourists during their visits because it will facilitate strategic planning of facilities, amenities and resources used in marketing and other promotional activities (Odunga, 2005). Majority of scholars in the tourism industry in Kenya have concentrated their studies on beaches (Chepkwony, 2009) and wildlife (Kieti, 2007, Mugo, 2007, Kiprop, 2007). No comprehensive and conclusive studies have been done in museums to determine their touristic, recreation, education and conservation value yet literature reviewed (Akama and Kemboi, 2000, Irandu, 2004, Jean, 2002, Kwame, 2007, Ondimu, 2002) shows that museums have high visitation potential due to the unique products and services they offer. This study was designed to establish ways of enhancing visitor experience in museums to increase visitation to museums in a bid to generate information on product presentation and interpretation thereby increasing and improving museum experience and visitors' satisfaction. The study is instrumental in identifying challenges facing museums in addressing the current tourists' needs and expectations. The study offers suggestions on how best the visitor's experience could be enhanced and their expectations realized thus increasing visitation in museums. The objectives of the study were to examine the purpose of visit to the museums; establish how visitors learn about the museum services, and to establish the products found in the museum and how they are interpreted.

Research Approach

This study was conducted in Kitale Museum in Kenya and adopted explanatory survey research design and would be generalized to all museums in Kenya. This research design helped the authors to have a deep insight and better understanding on the ways of enhancing museum experience to increase visitation. Using questionnaires and interview schedule, data was collected on the type of visitors, their travel reasons, products offered and whether they enjoyed the visit. The study used systematic random sampling technique to select visitors to the museum where a total of 200 visitors were sampled and 176 visitors returned the questionnaires duly filled. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data.

Findings and analysis

Findings show that majority of the visitors to Kitale Museum are local (97.2 %) and 2.8% were international. Of the 169 local visitors interviewed, 34.7 % came from within Kitale, 23.9 % from Eldoret, Nakuru-6.8%, Western 27.3%, and 2.3% came from Nairobi and 1.1% came from Lodwar. Out of all the visitors who visited the museum 60.8 % were male while 39.2 % were female.

The study further revealed that 66.5% of the visitors had come to the museum for education purposes (Table 1). This indicated that their source of motivation to travel was education and majority were students. The purpose of visit of the other 26.1 % was recreational. Others visitors to the museum were farmers, businessmen, accountants, teachers and stay home mothers.

Table 1: Purpose of visiting the museum

Purpose	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Education	117	66.5	66.5	66.5
Fun	46	26.1	26.1	92.6
Visiting friends/ relatives	13	7.4	7.4	100.0
Total	176	100.0	100.0	

From the table above, it implies that Kitale Museum receives visitors with diverse expectations and needs. The study established that Kitale museum depends on the National Museum of Kenya (NMK) to market or promote it locally and internationally. Majority of the visitors learnt about the museum through word of mouth (Table 2).

Table 2: Sources of information about Kitale Museum products

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Word of Mouth	134	76.1	76.1	76.1
News paper	19	10.8	10.8	86.9
Radio	4	2.3	2.3	89.2
Television	12	6.8	6.8	96.0
Internet	3	1.7	1.7	97.7
Brochure	4	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	176	100.0	100.0	

The high percentage of visitors who learnt about the museum through word of mouth implies that aggressive marketing techniques should be embraced to increase the visitors. Inadequate marketing of the museum and use of word of mouth more than mass media or other communication channels implies that Kitale Museum is either reluctant or has not embraced modern techniques.

The products offered according to the study were artifacts in the gallery which were displayed in glass cases or hanged on the walls. Majority of the visitors were dissatisfied with the way museum products were presented and interpreted. After developing a cultural product, appropriate interpretation of its cultural elements to prospective visitors is very important (Akama and Kemboi, 2000).

Findings revealed that the 55.1% of the visitors who were satisfied with the overall museum visit were sure of a return visit. However, 17% of the visitors that were dissatisfied would not make a return visit

Chi Square Test results showed that satisfaction of the visitors significantly affects the decisions of the visitors to want to make return visit ($\chi^2=149.961$, $df=4$, $p=0.000$). The findings of these study are in agreement with Engel *et al.* (1993) and with Pizam and Milman (1993) who asserted that if the level of performance of a product is as good as expected, the consumer will be satisfied but if the performance is less than expected, the consumer will be dissatisfied. Satisfaction therefore is derived from the evaluation from the experience, if it was good as it was supposed to be.

Furthermore, Chi Square Test results showed that a previous visit had a significant influence on the return visit ($\chi^2=6.789$, $df=2$ $p<0.031$). This implies that previous experience or visit to a destination by visitors usually informs subsequent visits to the same destination.

Conclusion and recommendations of the study

The museum receives very few visitors annually and the numbers decrease as you move away from the region, an indication that the museum is poorly marketed. It lacks tourism support facilities and services such as hotels, shops, curios or entertainment accessories

to cater for the visitors who visit the museum which may have contributed to visitors being dissatisfied with museum visitation. Furthermore, products in the museum gallery are poorly presented and interpreted to visitors contributing to dissatisfaction. Tourism Policy in Kenya recognizes that the community plays a major role in promotion of a favorable tourism image (National Tourism Policy, 2005). Community involvement enables a museum to get access to the community (Nyangila, 2006).

Recounting stories and narratives of travel (through diaries, stories to friends, photographs, emails and the like) is central to the tourism experience and marketing of the destination. According to Macleod (2006), 'globalized cultural experiences' are being produced by the tourism industry and tourists will remain less aware of the destination culture that may be desirable due to the inadequate marketing material that focuses on tried and tested successful formulaic images and narratives. If the tourist experience is to lead to a richer understanding of other cultures, and an increased chance for indigenous communities to successfully use their culture as an asset, the destination marketers should become sensitive towards the meaning of culture and the profile of the tourist.

The museum should become an inclusive and attractive destination through brand positioning to meet the changing tourist needs and expectations thus influencing return visits. Moreover, the museum should ably meet by diversifying their services and programs with the aim of improving their image and attracting more tourists. It should

embrace aggressive marketing techniques such as E-marketing and air documentaries to widen its target market. It should also develop publications such brochures and booklets, gallery guides and exhibition catalogs which can provide further documentation and disseminate more information about the museum.

Museums in Kenya already have developed cultural assets and attractions but policy on community involvement in the development and interpretation of the same are lacking. If such policies are developed by museums, it will lead to development of more cultural related products, proper interpretation and an overall improved image of museums. Transformation of museums through the local community conveying their beliefs, tastes and values would bring a new lease of life in museums and change the perceptions of museums as archives. It will enliven museums because the local communities have nostalgic experiences and values which if used would better interpret and present culture in museums. The local community could take part of the museum space and display their heritage through exhibitions, cultural fares, culinary skills, dances and performing arts. The advantages of such initiatives and participatory approaches is that communities can claim ownership of their heritage ensuring sustainability and transformation of museum programs.

The experiences, activities and desires of tourists in relation to seeking cultural interaction indicate that the travel experience is more than merely sightseeing and is about participating, experiencing and learning. As Stevenson (2000) observes, cultural

tourism is not just about looking; rather, it is about participation and experience and coming into contact with what is perceived (or pack-aged) as 'authentic' in order to learn about a culture or a particular set of cultural practices or productions through the encounter which is in agreement with findings for this study that visitors to museums should not only be passive but should be actively engaged in culture interpretation through dance or other cultural practices presented in museums.

The study however had limitations in the use of questionnaire survey which posed language challenges because all the questionnaires were in English and some visitors could not understand English which was addressed by the researcher through interpreting the questions for them in Kiswahili. Some visitors instead of filling and handing in the questionnaires went away with them while others returned them blank or partially filled. The researcher addressed this by giving out more questionnaires to meet the targeted sample size.

We therefore recommend that:

- Kitale museum should use a modern marketing techniques such as E-marketing and air documentaries, use of pamphlets, brochures and linkages like the World Wide Web to reach out to more visitors. It should also segment its market and products packaged and interpreted depending on the visitor's needs.

- The museum and the museum hall the only facility of its kind in the region should be transformed into an ultramodern facility with tourism support facilities such as shops, restaurants, cafeteria and play accessories as well as other facilities such as swimming pool, merry go round, and camping facilities to cater for tourists visiting the museum for recreation.
- The local communities should be involved in product interpretation to authenticate and enliven the museum products, to give them meaning and the cultural value they deserve and also to access the community's tangible and intangible heritage.
- The museum re- evaluate museum policies as nonprofit making institutions and adopt strategies that involve local communities to ensure the museum provides quality museum experience in line with the National Tourism Policy in Kenya and the expectations of Vision 2030.
- Museum should endeavor to attract visitors from learning institutions right from kindergarten to higher education. Museums should transform to social studies learning environment for all age groups.

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