

## **A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites**

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### **Abstract**

Use of website as a source of travel information by potential tourists has become ubiquitous such that its has compelled many tourism organizations to have websites. Tourism researchers have been questioning the value and effectiveness of tourism websites through empirical studies. Among the plethora of such studies, African particularly East African context seem to be ignored. This study focused on evaluating tourism promotion agencies' websites in East Africa particularly Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda.

Mixed methods combining both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used in evaluating content and design of four tourism agencies in the respective countries. Quantitative data were analyzed using one sample t-tests. All countries promote based on their natural attractions with Uganda capitalizing much more on natural attractions than others. Findings indicated average scores for the websites, albeit, variations within the elements of websites. Relatively, Kenyan website outshines those for other East African countries. From ANOVA tests, results indicated the four countries to

be in different baskets for some website design elements with Kenya and Uganda being in the upper echelons in text as well as picture, respectively. The study sets benchmarks for respective destination marketing organizations in East Africa to elevate their websites. In terms of methodology, the study provides a valid methodological approach that can be used in other contexts apart from tourism.

**Keywords:** website evaluation, East Africa, tourism, comparative analysis

### **Introduction**

Tourism is one of the world's most important activities, involving millions of people, huge sums of money and a source of employment to many people in both developing and industrialized countries (Sinclair & Stabler, 1997). Many developing countries including Sub-Saharan African countries depend much on tourism to earn foreign exchange, generate employment, infrastructure development, and economic diversification. According to UNWTO (2013), tourism industry has experienced continued expansion and diversification over the past six decades, becoming one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 2014), travel and tourism's total contribution to the global economy rose from 9 percent to 9.5 percent (nearly US \$7 trillion) in 2013 and therefore, it is a growing sector. The industry grew faster than other significant industries such as financial and business services; retail and distribution; public services; transport; and manufacturing. In most developed countries such as France, Spain and U.S, tourism is regarded as one of economic sectors contributing highly to economic development.

Due to rapid growth of the industry coupled up with stiff competition, countries need to market and promote their destinations aggressively.

### *A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

Marketing creates awareness about destinations, reminds tourists about certain attractions and also persuades them to visit destinations. There are numerous ways of marketing a tourism destination such as tourism trade fairs and exhibitions, media, meetings as well as conferences and websites. With rapid development of information and communication technology, tourists find it easy to search for destinations through websites. By visiting a website, a tourist can get information concerning attractions, means of transport and accommodation facilities suitable for his/her travel purposes. An attractive website is likely to influence number of tourists arriving in that destination and simplifies information search to tourists. According to Fryc (2010), tourism websites that are easy to use, keep up with updated technology and physically appealing attract most visitors to that specific destination. Dion and Woodside (2010) state that information availability, utility and value of information on websites are essential in choosing and planning a vacation or business trip. UNWTO and European Travel Commission (2010) explain that web-based information is, nowadays, a primary influence on consumer decisions in nearly all major markets.

Destination marketing organizations, worldwide, including those of East African countries have embarked on utilizing the Internet in marketing their destinations. Fyall and colleagues (2009) suggest that tourist organizations should make sure that they are present in a significant number of search engines (such as google, safari, mozilla firefox and internet explorer), but also they design strategies to increase website visibility in online search engines. East African countries that have abundant natural and cultural resources with huge potential for tourism have also joined the website bandwagon. For instance, all tourism promotion agencies of East African countries have their own websites. Despite having online presence, the tourism potential for the countries is yet to be attained. Two questions that arise, among others, is that related to marketing: 'are the destination marketing websites having appropriate information? Are they effective?'

(Woodside, 2010). It has been noted that within East African countries themselves, there is a difference in the absolute number of tourists compared to tourism attractions in the respective countries. For instance, in Tanzania, having numerous tourist attractions and friendly people, there has been a challenge to attract many tourists compared to other countries like Kenya and Uganda. In 2013, number of tourists arriving in Kenya were 1,434,000, in Uganda they were 1,206,000, while in Tanzania, they were 1,063,000 (World Bank, 2015). This indicates that, among other factors, there might be a promotional related problem, which led to that situation. Available information in the tourism websites might not communicate properly what the country is able to offer, might not be sufficient or might be of poor quality. In filling up the research gap, this study aimed at comparing the general appearance and contents of East African destination marketing websites.

The study had the following specific objectives: to compare types of products promoted in East African tourism websites; to evaluate contents of East African tourism marketing websites; and to compare design of East African tourism marketing websites. In due regard, information from this study can assist different tourism stakeholders like marketing organizations, central government, local government and tourism suppliers in marketing different tourism destinations.

### ***Theoretical Literature Review***

Continued development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made travel information to be ubiquitous. To destinations marketers, it is a challenge because they need to ensure that their websites are up-to-date and have sufficient information to assist potential travelers make final travel decisions. This challenge experienced by marketers has led into a stream of research focusing on tourism website evaluation (Ip, Law and Lee, 2011; Ting, Kuo, and Li, 2012) that aim at appraising utility of websites to tourists as well as marketing effectiveness of those websites. Ting and colleagues (2012) define website evaluation as a systematic

### *A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

exploration and judgment of site features like functions, characteristics, content, design or services within websites, and the way those features are presented. From 1995, when tourism suppliers and marketers embarked on usage of website for marketing purposes (Han and Mills, 2006), there has been an upward trend in tourism website evaluation (Ip *et. al.*, 2011; Ting *et. al.*, 2012) using different approaches and perspectives. Focusing on who are senders and receivers of information communicated through websites, the studies can be grouped into tourists and marketers. Studies focusing on tourists (e.g., Lepp, Gibson, and Lane, 2014; Tanrisevdi and Duran, 2011) used information recipients or users in evaluating tourism websites. Studies focusing on marketers used independent evaluators to assess the websites (e.g., Woodside, Vincente, and Duque, 2011).

In appraising website evaluation studies, Ip and co-workers (2011) divide those studies into three major strands that include evaluation by phases, evaluation by features, and evaluation by features as well as effectiveness. Evaluation by phases studies use a systematic structure in evaluating websites. In tourism studies, phases that are used to benchmark websites range from three phases (Doolin, Burgess and Cooper, 2002; Gupta, Jones, and Coleman, 2004) to a maximum of five phases (e.g., Bai, Hu, and Jang, 2006). The phases progress from basic provision of information by websites to complex relationship development with tourists using tourism organization websites. As indicated by Ip and colleagues (2011), despite the approach of evaluating the phase tourism website being systematic, the approach lacks dynamism that pertains to typical commercial websites. Appraising by features approach in evaluating websites is highly flexible and practical oriented because it focuses on website content as well as design. Due to its practical orientation, this approach is commonly used (Ip *et. al.*, 2011) because it focuses on what and how information is shared with the tourist rather than focusing on the suppliers' side of operations. The last approach that can be used in evaluating websites is that of features and effectiveness where effectiveness is measured through financial results and consumer purchase intention (Ip *et. al.*, 2011).

Measurement of financial results under this approach appears to be a challenge due to the fact that many firms are unlikely to divulge their financial data. This study adopted a combination of phases, features and effectiveness aspects in evaluating destination marketing organization websites.

Use of a combination in evaluating website is in line with common models used in evaluating websites. The models include the following: Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (MICA) and its variants like the extended model [(eMICA) Burgess and Cooper, 1999]; Information Communication Transaction, Relationship and Technical merits (ICTRT) model (Li and Wang, 2011); the Balance Score Card (Han and Mills, 2006); and We Quality Index (Fernandx-Cavia *et. al.*, 2014). Upon critically analysing the models, all appear to have a unifying approach of evaluating websites based on complexity of the websites in terms of content and design that basically reflect the eMICA model that was adopted in this study. The eMICA model suggests that organizations adopt e-commerce using websites by providing basic information about them and product offering, this stage is referred to as promotion. As organizations continue using websites, they can advance to provision stage where the website provides interactive options. The third stage of website adoption is referred to as processing stage where the website offers the possibility of online transaction. The eMICA model informed this study through use of the three stages in appraisal of the websites of DMOs in East Africa.

### ***Empirical Literature Review***

Website evaluation has been a focus of research for more than two decades with studies differing in context, methods, and findings (Ting *et. al.*, 2012). For instance, Fryc (2010) conducted a research about tourism websites and their usefulness to travellers using content analysis methodology. The researcher (*ibid.*) compared three tourism websites of Valencia, Marseille and Genoa cities located in the Mediterranean. The researcher (*ibid.*) found that interactive tourism websites that keep up with current technology will

### *A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

attract the most visitors to that specific city location. The author (*ibid.*) further ranked the websites to evaluate the most reliable and most appealing to today's busy travelers and found that Valencia's tourism website earned the best of the three tourism destination websites because it is easy to use, it has the most up-to-date technology sources and it is physically the most appealing. Although the research was done in Europe, it is helpful in informing the current study on aspects of comparison between countries. A study by Woodside, Vicente, and Duque (2011) that researched on tourism's destination dominance and marketing website usefulness came up with a metric measurements in evaluating usefulness of 40 destination marketing websites. The authors (*ibid.*) found that some destinations with few tourists relative to the destinations' total population included substantial amount of information in their websites, while some destinations with relatively many tourists did not include substantial information. In addition, some destinations with relatively few tourists were highly competent in designing websites useful for potential visitors (*ibid.*). Such findings question adage that the more of marketing and promotion the more the visitors.

Loda, Teichmann, and Zins (2009) conducted a study about destination websites' persuasiveness, using content analysis and experiment methods. The authors (*ibid.*) found that credibility and strength of communicated message may impact on change of propensity to visit a destination. Information on fundamental elements such as accommodations and attractions has the most effect on message credibility and tourists' change in propensity to visit a destination (*ibid.*). According to the authors (*ibid.*), there is substantial difference in persuasiveness of various tourism websites. Website elements concerning basic information seem to bring the most positive changes. Authors add value of emphasizing efforts on the message's strength and credibility in order to increase the number of visitation. Although the study was done in US and Austria, it was helpful to the current study because it used content analysis method, discussed the same issue of contents of tourism websites and showed areas of emphasis in order to increase the number of tourists in destinations.

According to Woolsey (2010), a destination website is ranked the best among others due to its ability to communicate the best information to tourists. Tourists will always visit a destination that gives them the best attractions as well as services and they can be aware about the attractions and services offered through information in the tourism promotional websites. Due to many countries depending on tourism as a source of income, foreign exchange, government revenue and employment, websites are competing to reach end-users by satisfying information needs (Buhalis and Pistidda, 2008) in order to attract a big number of tourists in their destinations to get the associated benefits.

However, due to increasing competition in information technology, only creative players will be able to survive in the tourism industry (Buhalis, 1998). In order to win the existing competition, tourism websites should include features that satisfy customer needs, provide accessibility to coverage of local information, interactivity, description and accommodation of multilingual as well as multicultural user population (Law, Buhalis, and Cobanoglu, 2014; Zhou & DeSantis, 2005). Websites are evaluated in order to assess their effectiveness in quantity of provided information provided, design of the website and reciprocity created with the customer (Canals, 2010). For success of a tourism destination, issues of information availability, quality and credibility are crucial (Buhalis & Pistidda, 2008). Ease of use is an essential factor for the tourist using the Internet when planning for holidays (Castañeda & Frías, 2009).

Zhou and DeSantis (2005) state that since many tourists come from foreign countries and regions, tourism websites should accommodate cultural differences and have sufficient understanding to provide services for users in different time zones with different languages, cultures, currencies as well as customs. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), the more search undertaken by a tourist and the more information found, the better customer needs can be met as well as served. A well informed tourist is able to



### *A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

interact much better with local resources and culture, to find products and services that meet his/her needs and to take advantage of special offers including reduced prices.

#### *Synthesis from Literature*

From literature reviewed, most authors emphasize on presence of websites in search engines, user-friendly, interactivity, quality and substantial information as well as design of the websites. Development of information and communication technology has enabled many people to have access to Internet thereby being able to get information from different websites. Message communicated through the website has a big influence on the tourist's decision to select the destination he/she wants to visit, and therefore, it is important to communicate a message that is well understood to both existing and potential tourists.

As discussed by many authors, websites enable tourists to access information they are looking for due to the fact that in today's world, information is power. When websites are well designed with sufficient and valuable information, they have attractions available in the destination and can communicate to different customers of different cultures, they are likely to increase the number of international tourists in the destinations. Available pieces information in the tourism websites are very essential in influencing inflows and outflows of tourists to the destinations. Internet has simplified the process of getting information due to the fact that it is easy for tourists to get almost all attractions, services and information they are looking for in the Internet. In addition, it is easy for tourists to purchase products and book for accommodation through the Internet.

Many reviewed studies related to this study have been conducted in America and a few from Europe. That might be due to technological growth and high rate of Internet use in those countries. Similar studies in countries of Africa help to improve marketing strategies, create awareness about

destinations and increase number of tourists including benefits because recommendations on websites improvement are provided. From those studies, it is important to take advantage of technological development and growth to promote attractions through websites so that tourists can get information in simplified ways.

### **Materials and Methods**

Furrer and Sudharshan (2001) indicate that websites qualify to be considered as sampling units where data can be obtained from. This study, using websites as sampling units, was conducted to analyze contents of tourism websites in East Africa, particularly Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. The websites where data were collected include [www.tanzaniatouristboard.com/](http://www.tanzaniatouristboard.com/) for Tanzania, <http://www.magicalkenya.com/> for Kenya, <http://www.visituganda.com/> for Uganda and <http://www.rwandatourism.com/> for Rwanda. Both qualitative and quantitative data research approaches were used due to their suitability for nature of the study and in order to achieve the stated objectives. Content analysis was used to analyze data from the tourism websites in East Africa. Two techniques were used in data collection. First, the researchers evaluated the four websites to appraise presence/absence of website contents with respect to design and information. For the more subjective evaluation of the websites, the researchers opted to use five independent evaluators who were approached by one of the researchers to participate in the study. Upon getting the potential evaluator's consent, the researcher using his/her laptop or the evaluators' laptop, opened the four websites to be evaluated. The evaluators, using a prepared evaluation form, were required to observe all websites before filling in the form to avoid biases that could emanate from the sequence of observing the websites. Collected website information pertained to attractions promoted in the website (national parks, cultural attractions, historic, game reserves and heritage sites), services as

### *A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

well as links that direct tourists to tourism attractions and services in respective countries. Design elements appraised from the websites included animation, appeal basing on colour, test appearance, pictures, sound and general appearance.

Data were organized in data matrix thereafter transported into excel and SPSS 19 for descriptive and inferential analyses. For objective content analyses of websites that were done by the researchers with the responses of Yes/No, the data yielded percentage results. From the five independent evaluators who were required to appraise the different website design elements using a prepared sheet, they were supposed to rank the design elements for each country using a scale of 1 to 5. The former denoted for the least appealing and the latter for the most appealing, while 2, 3 and 4 pertained to gradations in between anchors of 1 and 5. The scores from the independent evaluators were used to calculate means together with performance of one sample t-tests and one way ANOVA to test whether or not the four countries differ significantly in website design aspects.

### **Results**

A total of 4 tourism websites from 4 countries in East Africa were analyzed. Collected information pertained to general website appearance (animations, colours, texts, pictures, symbols, connotations and messages), appearances of natural attractions, services, cultural attractions and links to tourism services as well as attractions. Most appearances were counted in order to obtain their scores in the websites, and then tabulated in order to obtain a clear picture of products and services' occurrences.

Results presented in Table 1 reveal that natural attractions were a bit over two-thirds (69.3%) occurrences in the websites with the total of 61 appearances in the four websites among promoted tourism products promoted. Promoted services in the websites accounted for a total number of 19 (21.6%) appearances in the four countries among promoted tourism

products. Lastly, the aspect of culture accounted for only 8 appearances in the websites of the four countries, contributing to 9.1 percent appearances in the websites.

It can be observed that East Africa emphasizes more on natural attractions than cultural attractions as well as services. Results also indicated that natural attractions were highly promoted by Uganda, especially national parks (scored 19), while the country has fewer natural attractions than Tanzania and Kenya. Rwanda promotes fewer natural attractions in its website than other East African countries, but also the country has fewer natural attractions than the rest of the countries. In Rwanda, services are mostly promoted compared to other East African countries. Most promoted services are transport facilities, specifically local transport involving bike riding. Cultural attractions are highly promoted in the website of Uganda and all websites had links that direct tourists to attractions and services. Kenya has more links than other East African countries (scored 33).

Apart from tourism attractions promoted in the websites, the researchers also identified the number of natural attractions that are actually present in the respective counties in order to identify the relationship between promoted natural attractions and number of natural attractions present in those countries. Identified natural attractions included attractions such as national parks, game reserves, marine parks, museums and heritage sites. Table 1 reveals that Tanzania and Kenya have many natural attractions (49 in Tanzania and 45 in Kenya) but only a few attractions are promoted in the respective counties' websites (as indicated in Table 1). Uganda has few attractions but tries to promote many of them in the website in order to create good impression to the tourists and give them a wide range of choices. Comparing the above countries, Uganda promotes more natural attractions than the remaining East African countries.

*A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

**Table 1:** *Appearance of Tourism Products in East African Tourism Websites*

Country	Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda	Rwanda
<b>NATURAL ATTRACTIONS</b>				
National Parks	10	6	9	3
Beaches	4	3	2	0
Historical/heritage	1	1	0	3
Activities	3	3	8	5
<b>SCORES FOR ATTRACTIONS</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>ACTUAL ATTRACTIONS PRESENT</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>
Hotels and Lodges	0	2	2	2
Transport facilities	1	0	1	4
Tour Operators and Travel Agencies	1	3	2	1
<b>SCORES FOR SERVICES</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
Traditions	2	1	3	2
<b>SCORES</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>LINKS TO ATTRACTIONS</b>	28	33	31	24
<b>SCORES FOR LINKS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>

On evaluation of the four websites based on design, it was revealed that all websites were doing well by having contact information, attractions, links to social media and other websites together with animation (Table 2). All the websites were noted to perform very poorly because they lack information on foreign currency rates and language translation.

**Table 2:** Evaluation of East African Tourism Websites

Websites		Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda	Rwanda	% score
Content	Search engine	√	√	√	x	75
	Contact information	√	√	√	√	100
	Accommodation	x	√	x	x	25
	Weather	√	x	x	x	25
	Attractions	√	√	√	√	100
	Currency exchange rate/converter	x	x	x	x	0
	Visa and/or piracy policy	x	x	x	√	25
	Social media	√	√	√	√	100
	Language translation	x	x	x	x	0
	Online reservation	x	√	x	x	25
	Useful links	√	√	√	√	100
	Animation	√	√	√	√	100
	Option for other languages	x	x	√	x	25
	Navigation	√	√	√	√	100
	Background texture and/or color not overwhelming the text	√	√	√	√	100
	<b>Overall % Score</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>53</b>

**Source:** East African tourism websites. √= existent x= non-existent

For the relatively subjective website evaluation, five (5) evaluators, apart from the researchers, were employed. Results from the evaluators were entered into excel and then SPSS for descriptive as well as inferential analyses. The combined mean scores from the evaluators for the five design elements and overall means are presented in Table 3. The combined mean

*A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

scores from the different evaluators for each country were summated and the average for the four countries was calculated (Table 3). Generally, the evaluated websites can be ranked high with respect to pictures but very low on sound.

**Table 3:** *Evaluation of East African Website Designs*

Website		Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda	Rwanda	Mean	Mean Ranking
Web element	Animation	3.2	3.2	4	3.2	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4</b>
	Color	3.1	4	3.4	4.2	<b>3.675</b>	<b>3</b>
	Text appearance/font	3.2	4.4	3.6	4	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2</b>
	Pictures	3.6	3.6	5	3.6	<b>3.95</b>	<b>1</b>
	Sounds	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.4	<b>1.35</b>	<b>5</b>
	Over-all appearance	3.2	3.6	3.2	4	<b>3.5</b>	
<b>Mean country</b>		<b>2.94</b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>3.28</b>		

In testing whether or not mean scores for design elements and country means differ significantly from the average, a series of one sample t-test were performed (test value =3) with the results shown as Table 4. Results raveled that the mean for animation and overall country did not differ significantly, while those for colour, text, and picture were significantly different from the test value at 10 percent significance level. Mean scores for sound for all countries, in aggregate, were significantly lower than the test value at 1 percent significance level.

**Table 4:** One Sample T-test for Website Design Elements and Country Means

Website element	Mean	Stdev.	t-value
Animation	3.4	.4	2.00
Color	3.675	.51235	2.635*
Text	3.8	.51640	3.098*
Picture	3.95	.7	2.714*
Sound	1.35	.19149	-17.234***
Overall country	3.235	.21063	2.231

\*.1; \*\*\* .001. test value 3

There was the need to answer the main question that guided the study, ‘Are the four East African countries in the same basket?’ In due regard, one way ANOVA was performed and results are presented in Table 5. Results from the study revealed that among the five website design elements, text and pictures showed a significant difference between the four East African countries. In running the *post hoc* tests (see Benferroni and Duncan), results indicated that Kenya had significantly a better website based on text appeal than Uganda. For the other countries (Tanzania and Rwanda), means for text appeal did not indicate to differ significantly from that of Kenya and Uganda. Based on pictorial appeal, Kenya and Uganda significantly outshined the others with Kenya’s mean being significantly different from Tanzania and Rwanda.



*A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

**Table 5:** *One Way ANOVA Test for Design Element by Country*

Variable	Mean	Stdev.	F
Animation			.564
Tanzania	3.600	.54772	
Kenya	3.2	1.64317	
Uganda	4	1.00000	
Rwanda	3.2	1.09545	
Color			.620
Tanzania	3.6000	.54772	
Kenya	4.0000	1.22474	
Uganda	3.4000	1.51658	
Rwanda	4.2000	.44721	
Text			3.030*
Tanzania	3.8000	.83666 <sup>ab</sup>	
Kenya	4.6000	.54772 <sup>b</sup>	
Uganda	3.2000	.83666 <sup>a</sup>	
Rwanda	4.0000	.70711 <sup>ab</sup>	
Picture			4.889**
Tanzania	3.6000	.54772 <sup>a</sup>	
Kenya	4.2000	1.09545 <sup>ab</sup>	
Uganda	5.0000	.00000 <sup>b</sup>	
Rwanda	3.6000	.54772 <sup>a</sup>	
Sound			.133
Tanzania	1.2000	.44721	
Kenya	1.4000	.89443	
Uganda	1.2000	.44721	
Rwanda	1.4000	.89443	
Country mean			.679
Tanzania	3.2000	1.30384	
Kenya	3.6000	1.14018	
Uganda	4.1000	1.34164	
Rwanda	4.0400	.63875	

**Conclusions and Implications**

Recall, the study aimed at evaluation of destination marketing organizations' websites in East Africa. Results from the study indicated that East African websites had average contents for the potential tourist consumption. Thus,

it can be said that the East African DMO websites have not reached the highest level of website adoption as per the eMICA model (Burgess and Cooper, 1999). Kenya with the option of online reservation can be said to approach the processing stage that indicates the highest level of website adoption for commercial use (Burgess and Cooper, 1999). As per the argument of Zhou and DeSantis (2005) that tourism websites that cater for tourists from different countries with different background, the East African DMO websites are failing and/or likely to continue to fail in attracting as well as satisfying tourists from different countries. That is due to the fact that results indicated that the studies countries use only English as the communication language. With all the East African DMO websites having a social media option or link to social media, it can be said that they are doing well in this aspect of involving the tourists to communicate among themselves.

On website design, sound was found to be the main element that has been overlooked by all evaluated websites, while picture was of better appeal than other website design elements. Lack of some contents in the websites like translation services and foreign currency exchange implies that the respective destination marketing organizations are underutilizing their marketing potential via the Internet. Over-dependence on natural attractions in communicating with the potential tourist through the websites seemed to undermine non-natural attractions like culture that are abundant in the East African countries and the region at large. This indicated that the countries concentrated on their competitive advantage based on natural resources.

Results affirm applicability of the eMICA model in evaluating DMO websites in the African context. Practically, results from this study offer insights to DMO managers on points for improvement in capitalizing on use of electronic platforms. Given the nature of tourism products that are communicated in the websites, the DMOs should not only try include more

*A Comparative Analysis of East African Destination Marketing Websites*

of their natural attractions but also they should include other attractions like historical sites/monuments, cultural heritages and cultural traditions in the websites in order to attract tourists who are not after natural heritage attractions. Tourism products are not only attractions but also support services like accommodation, transportation, and other services and thus, it implies the DMOs should ensure such services are communicated in their websites to facilitate travel planning. In due regard, they will make their websites highly user-friendly and efficient to users, the tourists. The relatively average scores on aesthetic website design of the East African DMOs (ranging around 3 out of 5) implies that the DMOs need to improve the aesthetic in order to advance the mental imagery of viewers and thus, have more chances of enticing the potential tourists to opt for the destinations.

Like any other study, this study had its intrinsic limitations that must be known. In terms of context, the study was limited to only four African countries such that it implies that findings are for that context and at a particular time. Methodologically, the study was limited in the way it captured contents and design elements of the study because not all of them were incorporated. Despite these limitations, results from the study provide an up-to-date evaluation of the websites as well as introduces use of multi-methods approach in website evaluation. Future studies can address the limitations from this study and apply the methods in different contexts not only for context comparison but also for methodological comparison.

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