

Expectations and Comparison to other Destinations: Tourists visiting KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa

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Abstract: This study assessed tourists' judgements of the destination KwaZulu-Natal compared to expectations and other destinations. A structured questionnaire survey of 406 tourists in this destination yielded data for statistical analysis. Results show that tourists visiting KwaZulu-Natal mostly underpin this destination's favourable competitiveness on its comfortable weather conditions, strong sense of humanity, unique and diverse attractions and activities, and capability to provide visitors with new knowledge and authentic visitor experience. This study recommends that Tourism KwaZulu-Natal - the Destination Management Organisation, should try to improve on the cleanliness of the destination, the efficiency of its local transport services, and the destination's safety and security.

Keywords: tourists' expectations; tourism destination competitiveness; KwaZulu-Natal; South Africa; sub-Saharan Africa

JEL Classification: M31; O55; R11; Z32

1. Introduction

KwaZulu-Natal is one of the nine provinces in South Africa. It is the second most populous province in South Africa, behind Gauteng. The province of KwaZulu-Natal is located in the southeast of the country, bordering the Indian Ocean, three other South African provinces, and the nations of Mozambique, eSwatini (formerly, Swaziland), and Lesotho. The State of the Province Address reveals that tourism has a significant contribution to the KwaZulu-Natal local economy, growing from a R9bn contribution to the Provincial Gross Domestic Product in 2014 to more than R10bn in 2018 (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2019). As this popular tourism destination relies much on tourism for its local economic development, and domestic and international competition continues to grow, it is imperative that KwaZulu-Natal should continue to position itself favourably in the global tourism marketplace. Tourists will perceive a destination as favourably competitive if the destination attributes and image are appealing to them. Therefore, tourism destination marketers and academics find it worthwhile to measure, no matter how difficult it may be, tourists' perceptions of the destination attributes and image. This can be done by measuring tourists' level of satisfaction in the destination, how tourists actually experienced the destination compared to their expectations, and how they compare the destination to other destinations. Limited studies, regarding this study area, have been done in sub-Saharan African and other international tourism destinations. Some of the few studies done measured tourists'

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perceptions of a destination brand essence, brand image and brand position, or conceptually modelled destination competitiveness (such as Crouch, 2010; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Ezeuduji, Lete, Correia, & Taylor, 2014; Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016; Giannopoulos, Piha, & Avlonitis, 2011; Pike & Mason, 2011; Vengesai, 2003). This study therefore did not only measure tourists' level of satisfaction, but also assessed tourists' opinion of a destination (KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa) compared to their expectations and other destinations they have visited. The results will help the destination managers to continue to proactively improve or optimise their tourism product and service offerings.

2. Related Works

Researchers describe tourist satisfaction as the emotional state of mind of a tourist after being exposed to travel experiences (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Correia & Pimpao, 2008). Pratminingsih, Rudatin and Rimenta (2014) define tourist satisfaction as a degree of positive feelings, activated from the experience at the tourist destination. Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim (2010) employed the perception/experience-only approach to measure tourist satisfaction, by adapting four items that relate to tourists' feelings about their experiences at the destination. Satisfaction can assist to measure how the particular destination meets the needs of a tourist (Lee, Graefea, & Bums, 2007).

The functional and emotional benefits that tourists derive from visiting a destination are termed by Ezeuduji and Nkosi (2017), in their study, as brand essence. Brand essence, if crafted to reveal a clear value position of a destination, can offer a strategic competitive advantage to a tourism destination (Ezeuduji & Nkosi, 2017). Brand essence captures the core spirit of a brand, and its functional and emotional benefits (de Chernatony & Harris, 2010). It identifies the brand's competitive advantage and the benefits received when choosing a brand over its competitors (Light, Kiddon, Till, Heckler, Mathews, Hall & Wacker, 2012). Unlike many commercial products and services, the purchase of tourism offerings is usually infrequent (Wijethunga & Warnakulasooriya, 2014) and consists of a large amount of planning beforehand. The image of a destination is equally vital to tourists in their decision making. Hence, potential tourists are most likely to select a destination that has the most favourable image (Wijethunga & Warnakulasooriya, 2014) in their minds, and can provide the benefits demanded for when taking a trip outside of their usual environment. As earlier said, the benefits (functional and emotional) received when travelling to a destination are communicated through the brand essence of a destination. Functional benefits can be described as the primary purpose for travelling to a destination. The emotional benefits can be described as the intangible benefits received during the visitor experience while at a destination. These could be the benefits that tourists were not expecting to be part of, such as self-development and health benefits (Chen, 2012). Regarding tourism destinations, there is an overlap between emotions and place attachment. Tourists get attached to certain tourism destinations. People-place relationship involves a number of emotions, seen as positive; emotions such as pride, love and contentment, hence leading to tourists being attached to that destination (Manzo, 2005; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). According to Hosany, Prayag, Deesilatham, Caušević and Odeh (2015), people develop strong relationships with places. As a result of such developments, tourists can get attached to these places. Furthermore, studies indicate the prevalent influence of emotions on numerous aspects of tourist experiences. At a pre-travel stage, emotions play a vital role in tourist motivation. These emotions are also fundamental at post-consumption stage, as they are determinants of tourist behaviour. Emotions

influence tourist satisfaction, trust and commitment. Hosany et al. (2015) further adopt a two-dimensional conceptualization of place attachment; place dependence (related to functional attachment) and place identity (related to emotional attachment) in their discussion of destination branding. Dwyer and Kim (2003) state that there are indicators of destination competitiveness. Amongst these indicators is the quality of service offered within a destination. Perceived quality refers to consumers' feelings concerning the quality of a product or service associated with brand or destination (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2001; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Low & Lamb, 2000; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). The quality of service can be measured by, but not limited to, the performance standards in service delivery, programmes to ensure or measure visitor satisfaction, development programmes to enhance quality of service and attitudes of customs or immigration officials. Service quality is central to the development of strong service leading brands since it improves perceived superiority, and assists to differentiate brands in competitive markets (Nam, Ekinici, & Whyatt, 2011). Tourists who are satisfied with the service level of a destination are likely to return to that destination. Hassan, Hamid and Bohairy (2010) state that a community within a tourism destination can also participate in destination service quality and branding, via creating a unifying focus to aid all public, private, and non-profit sector organizations that rely on the image of the place and its attractiveness. This can lead to increased respect, recognition, loyalty, correcting out-of-date, inaccurate or unbalanced perceptions; improving stakeholder income, profit margins, and lodging tax revenues; enhancing civic pride and advocacy; and expanding the size of the 'pie' for stakeholders to get a larger share, rather than having to rely on pricing to steal their share (Hassan, Hamid & Bohairy, 2010).

3. Research Problem Statement

Literature reviewed by this study around destination branding and service quality revealed a gap that needs to be addressed. Earlier studies concentrated on measuring destination brand concepts, service quality and satisfaction in isolations. This study will take a more holistic approach, measuring not only tourists' level of satisfaction, but also assessing their opinions regarding a destination (KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa) brand compared to their expectations and other destinations they have visited. The results will summarily support the destination managers' continuous improvement or optimization of their tourism product and service offerings.

4. Research Design and Methods

Quantified data have been reportedly mostly used to make management decisions regarding mass phenomena such as tourism. This research assessed tourists' opinions of the destination KwaZulu-Natal compared to prior expectations and other destinations they have visited. We therefore employed a quantitative research approach using a structured questionnaire survey to collect data from tourists (respondents). The variables in the questionnaire reflect literature reviewed and authors' personal knowledge of the destination. Many social science studies support the use of questionnaire to collect quantified data from respondents (such as Ezeuduji, 2013; Tummons & Duckworth, 2013; Veal, 2011). We targeted domestic and international tourists visiting major tourist attractions in KwaZulu-Natal, between December 2017 and June 2018 (these include King Shaka International Airport, Richards Bay

Airport, Hluhluwe Game Reserve, and Talana Museum). This study period cuts across both peak and off-peak seasons in South Africa. We used a non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling to recruit respondents to complete the questionnaire. According to Veal (2011), when using non-probability sampling methods of data collection, the absolute size of the sample is more important than the sample size relative to the research population. The criteria to determine sample size should therefore entail the required level of precision in results, the proposed details in analysis, and the available budget. We surveyed a total of 420 tourists, however 406 questionnaires received were usable for data analyses. We employed IBM's SPSS Statistics, version 25 (IBM Corporation, 2017) for data analyses. We conducted descriptive analyses (percentage frequencies and mean scores), bivariate analysis (Spearman's Correlation tests), and multivariate analysis (Reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha) to enable us address the research objectives. The bivariate analysis was done at a 95% confidence interval. The reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient employed a cut-off point of 0.7 to explain internal consistency or reliability of variables used to explain brand essence dimensions - functional and emotional attributes (Bühl & Zöfel, 2005; George & Mallery, 2003; Hair, Black, Babin & Tatham, 2005; Iwu, Ezeuduji, Iwu, Ikebuaku & Tengeh, 2018). These brand essence variables' responses are presented in the questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale (ordinal variables). Based on the reliability test results, brand essence dimensions - functional and emotional dimensions show internal consistency, as the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are well above 0.7 benchmark. As it is common in social sciences, we found that the population distributions of ordinal dimensions are not normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov's and Shapiro-Wilk's tests of normality yielded p-values of less than 0.001). We therefore conducted a non-parametric test (Spearman's correlation) to compare these variables. The use of Spearman's correlation tests to compare ordinal variables were supported by Veal (2011).

5. Results and Discussion

Results presented in Table 1 reveal that more tourists above 30 years of age responded to the questionnaire survey in comparison to the younger tourists. More than half of the tourists' sample are international tourists, and a significant number of the tourists (about 30%) got to know about KwaZulu-Natal through word-of-mouth. Majority of them stayed not more than ten days in the destination, and much of them are either on holiday or visiting friends and relatives. It is good for Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (responsible Destination Management Organisation) that 61% of tourists are on return visit; about 83% are either mostly or totally satisfied; about 81% of the tourists assessed KwaZulu-Natal as little or much better than they expected; and about 72% of the tourists rated KwaZulu-Natal as little or much better than other destinations they have visited. We therefore infer that KwaZulu-Natal is a favourable and competitive tourism destination in the mind of tourists themselves, and holiday and visiting friends and relatives can be considered the main motives for tourists visiting this destination. As earlier said in the literature review, Pratminingsih, Rudatin, and Rimenta (2014) state that tourist satisfaction is caused by two dimensions: firstly, by the pre-expectation of the tourist before travel, and secondly, by the justification of the tourist on the delivered services after the travel, based on the actual experience. We therefore posit, like many authors before us, that tourists' satisfaction is amplified when their experiences are met or are beyond their expectations.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents (N = 406)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Female	49.0
	Male	51.0
Age group	Equal or less than 30 years' old	40.1
	Above 30 years old	59.9
Origin	South African	47.0
	Non-South African	53.0
Continent of origin	Africa	52.8
	Australia/ Oceania	7.9
	Asia	6.4
	Europe	19.3
	North America	8.9
	South America	4.7
Type of tourist	Domestic tourists	47.0
	International tourists	53.0
Source of Information about KwaZulu-Natal	Internet	26.2
	Word of Mouth	30.2
	Media (travel magazines and books, T.V)	21.0
	Travel Agency/ Tour Operator	20.8
	Other	1.7
Group travel	Yes	46.4
	No	53.6
Length of stay in KwaZulu-Natal	1-10 days	65.6
	11 days or longer	34.4
Purpose of visit to KwaZulu-Natal	Business (seminar, event, conference)	13.4
	Business (import and export)	9.7
	Holiday	45.2
	Visiting friends and relatives	16.9
	Medical	2.2
	Academic exchange	9.7
	Other	3.0
Have you visited any KwaZulu-Natal destination before?	Yes	61.0
	No	39.0
Level of satisfaction	Totally satisfied	34.3
	Mostly satisfied	49.1
	Moderately satisfied	12.3
	Mostly dissatisfied	3.7
	Totally dissatisfied	0.5
Overall judgement of visiting KwaZulu-Natal compared to expectations	Much better	45.7
	Little better	35.7
	About the same	17.3
	Little worse	1.0
	Much worse	0.3
Overall judgement of visiting KwaZulu-Natal compared to other destinations	Much better	34.5
	Little better	37.3
	About the same	23.0
	Little worse	4.8
	Much worse	0.5

In Table 2, we measured the mean scores of how the tourists experienced the functional attributes of KwaZulu-Natal during their visit. This study found that the variables used to measure this brand essence dimension are internally consistent or reliable. The top 5 variables to which the tourists have the highest level of agreements include: ‘KwaZulu-Natal has comfortable weather conditions’, ‘KwaZulu-Natal has excellent accommodation facilities’, ‘KwaZulu-Natal is unique and has diverse attractions and activities’, ‘KwaZulu-Natal tourism destinations cater for different types of tourists’ and ‘KwaZulu-Natal destination is well developed for tourism’. These therefore reveal the top 5 functional attributes that make this destination to be considered better than other destinations that the tourists have visited. However, this study notes that tourists did not collectively agree to these 2 statements: ‘KwaZulu-Natal is a clean destination’, and ‘Local transport in KwaZulu-Natal is efficient’. KwaZulu-Natal destination managers need to improve on the cleanliness and the local transport services of the destination. This study found a high level of positive correlation between the KwaZulu-Natal functional attributes on the one hand; and the tourists’ level of satisfaction, the overall judgement of KwaZulu-Natal compared to expectations, and the overall judgement of KwaZulu-Natal compared to other destinations on the other hand.

Table 2. Comparing Tourists’ Expectations and Brand Essence – Functional Attributes

Brand Essence – Functional Attributes				
Statements	Mean Score ^a	Correlation with level of satisfaction / expectations / comparison to other destinations ^b		
		Level of satisfaction	Expectations	Comparison to other destinations
1. KwaZulu-Natal is unique and has diverse attractions and activities	1.78	**	**	**
2. KwaZulu-Natal destination is well developed for tourism	1.80	**	**	**
3. KwaZulu-Natal has comfortable weather conditions	1.71	**	**	**
4. KwaZulu-Natal tourism destinations cater for different types of tourists	1.80	**	**	**
5. KwaZulu-Natal has adequate and well-maintained infrastructure	1.90	**	**	**
6. KwaZulu-Natal provides tourists with good value for their money	1.84	**	**	**
7. KwaZulu-Natal has a lot of events for tourists to attend	1.88	**	**	**
8. KwaZulu-Natal has excellent accommodation facilities	1.76	**	**	**
9. KwaZulu-Natal is a clean destination	2.06	**	**	**
10. KwaZulu-Natal has excellent shopping facilities	1.94	**	**	**
11. KwaZulu-Natal has excellent entertainment facilities	1.93	**	**	**
12. Local transport in KwaZulu-Natal is efficient	2.09	**	**	**
Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of brand essence – functional attributes), Cronbach’s Alpha =.860, N of Items = 12, Valid cases = 351 (86.5%), Excluded cases = 55 (13.5%), Total = 406				



Notes: ^a Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

^b Spearman's Rank correlation test significance. **, $p < 0.01$.

Ezeuduji and Nkosi (2017) observed that the province of KwaZulu-Natal is well liked for its heritage and cultural offerings. They further state that its rich heritage (cultural and natural) is a key anchor to its tourism industry. The improvement of the cleanliness of KwaZulu-Natal can however be primarily affected by the provincial and municipal governments, and the local community members. Provincial and municipal governments employees who are tasked with cleaning the surroundings have to improve on their services, and the local community members should also regularly volunteer to uphold a clean and healthy environment. The results from this study also highlight the need for improvement regarding local transportation. This responsibility falls on travel operators, public and private transport services.

These results agree with Hosany et al.'s (2015) inference that tourists develop strong relationships with destinations as a result of products, services and conditions offered or found in the destination. Dwyer and Kim (2003) further discussed the indicators of destination competitiveness; amongst these indicators is the quality of service offered within a destination. Perceived quality is said to refer to consumers' feelings concerning the quality of a product or service associated with brand or destination (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2001; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Low & Lamb, 2000; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). We therefore argue that tourists' overall satisfaction has a direct relationship with the quality of functional attributes found within the destination, supporting the finding of del Bosque and San Martín (2008). The study results presented by this study have strongly demonstrated that the satisfaction level will also result in the tourists forming in their minds a positive brand image of the destination, and this can lead to brand loyalty. Manzo (2005), and Scannell and Gifford (2010) reflectively argue that tourists may get attached to tourism destinations; and people-place relationships may involve several emotions, seen as positive: emotions such as pride, love and contentment. These can lead to tourists being attached to a destination, and may as well perceive it superior to other destinations.

In Table 3, we measured the mean scores of how the tourists experienced the emotional attributes of KwaZulu-Natal during their visit. This study also found that the variables used to measure this brand essence dimension are internally consistent or reliable. The top 5 variables to which the tourists have the highest level of agreements include: 'My visit to KwaZulu-Natal will be memorable', 'My visit to KwaZulu-Natal has been valuable to me', 'I have gained new knowledge and experience during my visit to KwaZulu-Natal', 'KwaZulu-Natal provides tourists with authentic visitor experience', and 'I feel a strong sense of humanity in KwaZulu-Natal'. It is important to note here that the concept of *Ubuntu* in Zulu language refers to the strong sense of humanity that is highly valued amongst the local populace of KwaZulu-Natal. These results reveal the top 5 emotional attributes that make this destination to be considered better than other destinations that the tourists have visited. However, this study notes that tourists did not collectively agree to the statement: 'I feel safe and secure travelling in KwaZulu-Natal'. KwaZulu-Natal destination managers need to improve on the safety and security of the destination. This study found a high level of positive correlation between the KwaZulu-Natal emotional attributes on the one hand; and the tourists' level of satisfaction, the overall judgement of KwaZulu-Natal compared to expectations, and the overall judgement of KwaZulu-Natal compared to other destinations on the other hand.

Table 3. Comparing Tourists’ Expectations and Brand Essence – Emotional Attributes

Brand Essence – Emotional Attributes				
Statements	Mean Score ^a	Correlation with level of satisfaction / expectations / comparison to other destinations ^b		
		Level of satisfaction	Expectations	Comparison to other destinations
13. KwaZulu-Natal provides tourists with authentic visitor experience	1.74	**	**	**
14. My visit to KwaZulu-Natal has been valuable to me	1.66	**	**	**
15. My visit to KwaZulu-Natal will be memorable	1.57	**	**	*
16. I have gained new knowledge and experience during my visit to KwaZulu-Natal	1.71	**	**	**
17. The local people in KwaZulu-Natal are friendly and hospitable	1.78	**	**	**
18. I feel safe and secure travelling in KwaZulu-Natal	2.16	**	**	**
19. I feel a general sense of joy visiting KwaZulu-Natal	1.86	**	**	**
20. KwaZulu-Natal evokes an emotion of love for me	1.96	**	**	**
21. I feel a general sense of inspiration in KwaZulu-Natal	1.97	**	**	**
22. I feel a strong sense of humanity in KwaZulu-Natal	1.75	**	**	**
Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of brand essence – emotional attributes), Cronbach’s Alpha =.853, N of Items = 10, Valid cases = 373 (91.9%), Excluded cases = 33 (8.1%), Total = 406				

Notes: ^a Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

^b Spearman’s Rank correlation test significance. *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$.

Ezeuduji and Nkosi (2017) stressed on the need to improve safety and security in KwaZulu-Natal and other South African destinations through police presence and community policing. The local community members are important stakeholders in their tourism development and management, as a downturn of tourism will largely and particularly affect them adversely. Aho (2001) posits that emotions play a huge part in tourists’ experience in a destination. Branding of destinations allows tourists to recognize a destination and distinguish it from other competitive offerings. It then becomes easier for the tourists to identify the brand they prefer amongst other brands (Cevero, 2013). This is in agreement with Light et al.’s (2012) position that the brand’s competitive advantage as well as the benefits received through a brand determine whether customers can choose a particular brand over its competitors or not. Other authors (such as Chuang, 2007; Goossens, 2000; Kwortnik & Ross, 2007) posit that tourists are mostly influenced by their emotions to make purchases. Emotions play a vital role in defining unforgettable experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In this regard, Gnoth (1997) states that tourist’s emotional reactions are essential precursors of post-consumption behaviours and previous studies point out how emotions affect tourists’ satisfaction (such as del Bosque & San Martín 2008). According to Donio,

Massari and Passiante (2006), satisfaction and commitment are valid indicators of brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction is a matter of value perception, measured as congruence between expected and perceived values.

6. Conclusions

This study measured tourists' level of satisfaction and assessed their opinion of KwaZulu-Natal tourism destination in comparison to their expectations and other destinations they have visited. The results will help the destination managers to continue to proactively improve or optimise their tourism product and service offerings. The main results obtained by this study show that KwaZulu-Natal is a favourable and competitive tourism destination in the mind of tourists, and holiday and visiting friends and relatives can be considered the main motives for tourists visiting this destination. Visitors to KwaZulu-Natal mostly underpin this destination's favourable competitiveness on its comfortable weather conditions, unique and diverse attractions and activities, strong sense of humanity, and capability to provide visitors with new knowledge and authentic visitor experience. We therefore recommend that Tourism KwaZulu-Natal - the Destination Management Organisation, should try to improve on the cleanliness of the destination, the efficiency of its local transport services, and the destination's safety and security. More efforts are therefore needed, based on the discussions in this study, from the provincial and municipal governments, the police, local community members, travel operators, public and private transport services.

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